

# BURMA UNDER THE JAPANESE

*Pictures and Portraits*

BY

THAKIN NU

PRIME MINISTER OF BURMA

+

Edited and translated, with

Introduction by

J. S. FURNIVALL

*U. Nu*

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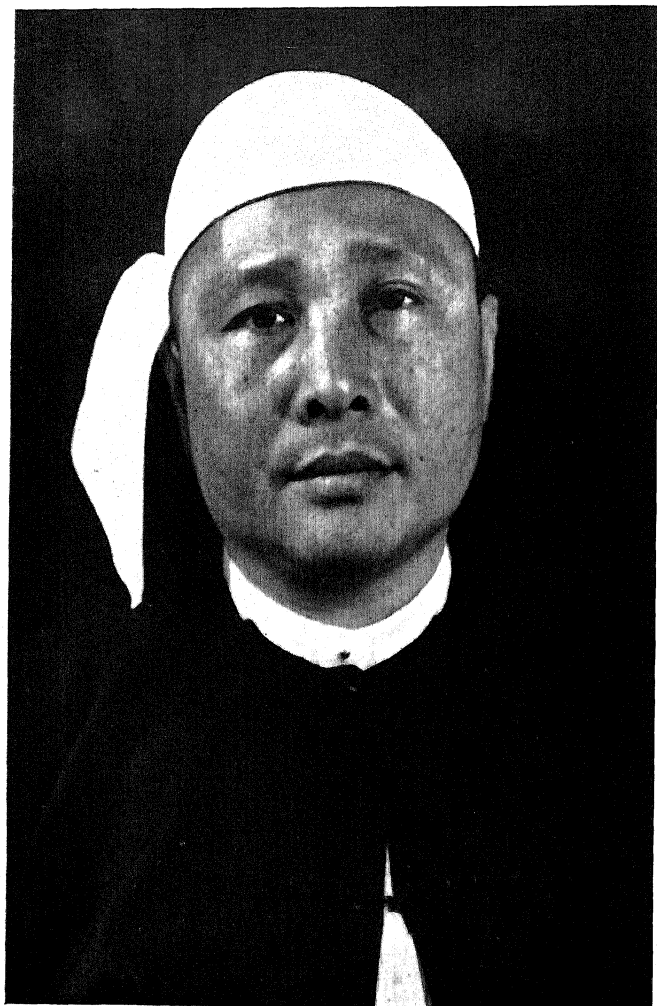
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TO  
THE DEMOCRATIC FORCES  
WHO ARE MAKING GREAT SACRIFICES  
TO SAVE THE WORLD FOR  
FREE PEOPLES

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U NU (THAKIN NU)



## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

**A**MONG all the many things that happened in Burma under Japanese rule I was personally concerned with only a very few. In this account I have tried to confine myself to what I actually knew and saw and heard, and so far as possible to exclude what I only heard at second hand. So in almost every chapter there are many gaps. For example, there are many who know more than I do about the incidents in the chapters on the attainment of independence, on the resistance movement and on the Burma-Karen reconciliation. My original intention was that this book should appear along with the stories of these other leaders. But they have been far too busy, and there have been difficulties about paper and printing, and so I have finally decided to leave the book as you now see it. But I am by no means satisfied with this. All who played any part then should place their experience on record for the benefit of future historians.

There is just one other thing that I feel bound to say. I have heard a story of a high British official who went out shooting with his Burman shikari. They both fired at the same time and the victim fell. Highly delighted, the official cried out in his Anglo-Burmese 'Me shot him, me shot him'. But when they came up to it they found it was a man and not a stag. 'No me shot him', exclaimed the official. In this account of the resistance movement and at a time like the present it would be only human nature if I succumbed to the temptation to say 'Me shot him'. But in writing it I have done my best to resist the temptation to exaggerate my part. If here and there I have not been quite successful and a little too much of this human weakness peeps out, I must ask readers to forgive me.

THAKIN NU

5 WANING TAZAUNGMON, 1307 B.E.  
24 November 1945

## AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

**B**EWARE OF PIED PIPERS! — This, as I look back on the past before the war and afterwards, seems to me the moral of this little book.

Before the war so many Burmans were so ready to follow the seductive piping of the Japanese without realizing at all in what direction it was leading us. And it led us to the Japanese occupation and to the oppression that we suffered under Japanese rule.

Yet even now it seems that many of us have not learned the lesson. All over the world pipers are chanting new tunes that open up entrancing visions of imaginary wonderlands. These tunes find their way to Burma and men and women who are deluded by them stir up trouble in various ways that would only bring ruin to the country. They are like foolish children who listen to their aunt rather than to their mother.

So I hope these sketches of life in Burma under the Japanese will help to teach my countrymen not to follow in the train of these pied pipers, however seductively their tunes may strike the ear.

U NU<sup>1</sup>

12 January 1953

<sup>1</sup> *The Prime Minister, formerly known by his party label as Thakin Nu, has now replaced 'thakin' by U (Uncle), the usual style applied to men of standing.*

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## INTRODUCTION v

IN this little book Thakin Nu, Prime Minister of Burma since it regained independence on 4 January 1948, relates what he saw of Japanese rule in Burma. It has the value of contemporary evidence, for it was written between August and November 1945 during the first months of the British reoccupation when he vainly hoped that at last he had achieved his long-cherished project of abandoning politics for literature. He was too close to the events for any complete and formal history and aimed merely at making his own contribution to a series of accounts by others who had shared with him the task and risk of governing the country under the Japanese while at the same time organizing resistance against them. He confined himself accordingly to his own personal experience, thinking that others would supplement it with particulars on which they were better informed. But most of them were still active in the political arena and no other account has yet been published. No one else, however, was so well qualified by experience to tell the whole story, or was more free of bias for or against Dr. Ba Maw, then head of the Government. For Thakin Nu before the war was a leader in a rival group and yet, under the Japanese, he was closer to Dr. Ba Maw than most of Dr. Ba Maw's own group, and was also his main channel of communication with the men who were plotting against his Government. Thakin Nu took no part in the fighting and he hardly mentions the war until it swept him away as a refugee in the final Japanese retreat. Apart from this, however, little happened in which he was not concerned, so that the record of his personal experience presents a chronicle of the general

course of events. That is all that he has attempted, a history from the standpoint of the cinema presented in a series of moving pictures.

We see the prisoners deserted in the cholera-stricken jail in Mandalay, some tending the sick and others thinking only of loot; villagers hastening to welcome the Japanese with gifts and garlands and returning crestfallen and disillusioned; the Japanese reaction to the framed 'testimonial from King George' that hung in Dr. Ba Maw's drawing-room as a memento of his visit to the coronation; the elaborate preparations for consecrating a national standard, the keen controversy whether it would better symbolize new Burma with a peacock or a rising sun, and the abrupt refusal of the Japanese to sanction all this nationalist nonsense; the cobra that would not wait for Thakin Nu to make up his mind whether a good Buddhist would be justified in shooting it. These and many similar vivid touches, set against a background of plot and counter-plot, the ever-present dread of spies and informers and the terror of arbitrary arrest and torture, are related in a human document which gives a more realistic and convincing picture of Burma under Japanese rule than a scientific history complete with references and statistics. We see something also of the chief actors; glimpses of the urbane presence of Thakin Mya, wisest of the nationalist leaders, and of the bluff personality of General Aung San, the hero and founder of Burma's independence. About Dr. Ba Maw, his strong points and his weaknesses, Thakin Nu tells us almost as much as he does, consciously and unconsciously, about himself. We see also the communists sowing the seeds of nationalist resistance; Thein Pe setting up a hand-press in the jungle to print anti-Japanese leaflets; Than Tun conciliating the Karens; and Thakin So, facing unpopularity among his fellow prisoners in a British jail by urging the duty to assist the British and their allies against fascism, disappearing across the moun-

tains to join the army of Chang Kai-shek, and at the end of the book reappearing from the swamps of the Delta, in disguise and carrying a tommy-gun. To the understanding reader this book should be of more than local importance from the light it throws on Japanese and Burmese psychology, on methods of rule in subject countries with its reactions on the mentality and conduct of both rulers and subjects, and their implications with regard to political relations in the past and political developments in the future, not in Burma only but in the rest of South-east Asia.

Much can be learned from it by an understanding reader. But to a western reader all these names are strange and the whole setting unfamiliar; can a western reader acquire the necessary understanding? There have been many books on India written in English by Indians, some on the Philippines by Filipinos, a few, by Mr. Sharir and others, written in Dutch on Indonesia, and probably some by Viet-nameese in French on Indo-China. But these, if not intended primarily for the western world, were written with one eye on the western reader. In this book the author is chatting familiarly to his own people in their own language, and it has the personal quality of private conversation. In order to understand it, even in an English version, the reader must know something of the background that Thakin Nu takes for granted.

At the end of the 18th century Burma had a national history dating from almost exactly the same time as the Norman conquest of England. But it was still buried in the Middle Ages. About the beginning of the 19th century the course of world progress brought it into contact with the West. Its rulers shrank from the challenge of the modern world, and the loss of independence was the inevitable penalty. In 1826, 1852 and 1886 it was incorporated piecemeal in the Indian Empire. This resulted in astonishingly rapid economic progress. But the British

Government never succeeded in capturing the imagination of the people ; it remained a foreign government commanding no more than a reluctant acquiescence. The final annexation of the northern province was achieved in 1886 after an almost bloodless campaign. Yet the advance of the army into the northern province was the signal for a general rebellion in the south. 'The people do not want us', wrote a senior official, 'any more than they did thirty years ago. They rose to throw off the yoke, now they are still carrying on a guerilla warfare against us.' This rebellion, however, was a peasant rising. Only one district headquarters had to be temporarily evacuated and other towns remained quiet. In the towns Burmans could appreciate more justly the strength of Government, and the mixed population was largely non-Burmese. The Government, however, failed to learn anything from the rebellion. It made no attempt to foster the national sentiment for constructive ends and was content to rely upon its strength. During the next twenty years occasional sporadic disturbances rarely extended beyond one or two villages and were promptly suppressed.

Then, as elsewhere in South-east Asia, the Japanese defeat of Russia in 1905 inaugurated a new era. It opened the eyes of the educated classes in the towns to the possibility of using western methods to shake off western rule, transforming the former vague and instinctive national sentiment into modern nationalism. Western education seemed the most serviceable instrument of national liberation. National sentiment was closely associated with religion, and the first expression of the new movement was the formation of a Young Men's Buddhist Association on the lines of the Young Men's Christian Association but with a nationalist bias and political implications. Educational progress, however, was conditioned by the economic environment ; it multiplied educated unemployables and made the people more restive under western rule,



but as a means of national liberation it was a broken reed.

When nationalists were beginning to recognize the political inadequacy of western education the first World War encouraged them to look for other means. The popular catchwords, democracy and self-determination, appealed to them. Democracy seemed to imply rule by the majority. In Burma there was a large majority of Burmans and democracy appeared to offer a short-cut to self-determination. With the growing disappointment in western education as an instrument of political advance they began to look more hopefully to western political institutions. Political reforms were in the air. The YMBA was succeeded by a more comprehensive organization, the General Council of Burmese Associations (GCBA), and at a conference in 1921 the deletion of the words 'within the Empire' from a resolution claiming the speedy attainment of Home Rule showed that, for the first time, independence was envisaged as an attainable political objective. The following summary of subsequent developments is based on the Memorandum submitted in 1930 by the Government of Burma to the Indian Statutory Commission. In 1923 executive rule was transformed into a form of constitutional government imitating western political institutions. The Executive Government consisted of the Governor with an Executive Council containing two Members nominated by the Governor and two Ministers responsible to a Legislative Council. In certain subjects the powers of Government were transferred to the Legislative Council. This was the system that came to be known as Dyarchy. The Legislative Council was mainly elective, and the electorate, with a wide franchise, was overwhelmingly Burmese; but the Burmese vote was counter-balanced by the representation of commercial interests and of foreign and other minorities together with a nominated official block. Nationalists condemned the new form of

government as undemocratic but were sharply divided as to how far they should co-operate with it. One section decided to boycott the elections to the new Council; another proposed to contest the elections but to boycott the proceedings of the Council; a third preferred to work within the Council as the best way to achieve further political reforms.

This last group broke off from the GCBA and entered the Council as the National Party under the leadership of U Ba Pe, who is still active in politics. The National Party formed the official Opposition but, as some of its leaders accepted office, 'the Council afforded the somewhat unusual spectacle of opposition by a party to a government in which its own leaders were ministers'. In subsequent elections the two more extreme groups participated and the National Party was merged with them in a People's Party, still under the leadership of U Ba Pe, with the professed object of making the system of dyarchy unworkable. 'The dominant ideal of all sections was Burma for the Burmans; they were all eager for self-government and their leaders differed only as to degree and method.' The few Burmese members who supported the Government shared their general aims but were 'in favour of gradual advance on more conservative lines'. Ministers selected from the Opposition, however, secured pay and perquisites for themselves and places for their followers; they adopted or were unable to change the current policy of the department of which they were nominally in charge, and the new constitution made little change in practical administration, while 'for obvious practical reasons it was necessary to refrain from difficult and contentious legislation'.

The political reforms, however, whetted the appetite of politicians without capturing the imagination of the people. In the constituencies political activities were 'governed by the crude question of foreign rule'. Espe-

cially among the uneducated classes the Buddhist clergy exercised great influence and from the beginning nationalism was closely associated with religion. The monastic order had gained less and lost more under foreign rule than any other section of the community, and one of the chief founders of modern nationalism was a Buddhist monk who visited Japan in 1909. Many soon learned that the yellow robe was a useful cloak for political intrigue. Monks of this type formed an association, which 'threw in its lot with the political extremists and ere long dominated their activities', so that the spread of disorder among the Buddhist clergy became one of the most difficult problems that the Government had to face. From 1926 onwards itinerant preachers stimulated unrest in rural areas. 'The people did not want us' any more than in 1886; probably less. For at that time they were peasants cultivating their own land; since then economic progress had transformed the peasantry of the rice lands into a proletariat of under-employed agricultural labourers, or rack-rented tenants holding land on a precarious tenure or, at best, small landowners hopelessly involved in debt. The uneducated classes were no less a prey to superstition than before, and education, with no market for its products in industry and commerce, multiplied unemployment. Economic forces broke down social order in the villages and the illusion of democratic forms undermined executive authority. In 1930 the gathering unrest exploded in the most serious rebellion since 1886, which spread rapidly over the whole region where economic progress had been most intense, the territory taken over in 1852. The rebels, styling themselves Galons, created a military organization, and the Government had to call in one British and five Indian battalions from India. Despite the capture of the leader in August 1931 the rebellion was not finally suppressed until 1932.

It was against this background that there arose a

question which split the nationalist ranks by drawing a new line of division. Prospects of further constitutional advance in India involved a consideration of the separation of India and Burma. Europeans in general favoured separation. Indians opposed it. Burmans had no sentimental attachment to India, and to many separation from India seemed implicit in the idea of independence; many, however, regarded it as a subtle device to rescue Burma from 'the Lost Dominion' and to burke progress towards democracy. Fervent advocates of Home Rule had no eyes for anything outside Burma, with the paradoxical result that the new issue linked them up in uneasy alliance with the European community, the stoutest opponents of Home Rule; on the other hand, it confirmed the most extreme nationalists in their suspicion of the British Government and brought them closer to the Indian community. Before the reforms of 1923 there was little racial friction and, apart from a certain antipathy to Indian money-lenders, the relations between Burmans and Indians were amicable. One natural result, however, of the communal system of representation was a growing cleavage between the various communities. This became evident even before the end of the first Council, and in the next Council the Indians usually sided with the Government against the Burman Opposition. In 1930 there was a serious anti-Indian riot. Burmans usually look on the Chinese kindly as their cousins, but in 1931 there was an affray also between the Burmese and Chinese. About the same time, too, there was keen resentment of an alleged combination of European millers to control the rice market. The issue of independence threw the fat into the fire. A warmly contested election gave a majority to the anti-separationists, but the Government did not accept this as a correct representation of Burman opinion and decided in favour of separation.

Further political developments are summarized in the *Burma Handbook*, published in India in 1943 by the refugee

Government of Burma. The leader of the anti-separation movement was Dr. Ba Maw, who first came to the front through his courageous defence of the accused in the rebellion trials. After the decision of the Government on the separation issue he threw in his lot with the People's Party, but in 1936 seceded to form the *Sinyetha* (Poor Man's or Popular) Party, and took part in the election for the new Parliament, but with the avowed intention of wrecking the constitution. The new Government consisted of the Governor with a Cabinet of 10 members responsible to the legislature for all matters within the very wide scope of its authority. The legislature consisted of a Senate of 36 members, half nominated, and a House of Representatives with 132 members. There was no longer an official block, but there were only 92 territorial non-communal constituencies and the other members represented communal or other special interests. Thus the system of representation still aggravated racial tension. A Burmese leader, dependent entirely on a Burmese majority, would have to command at least two-thirds of the Burmese votes. It never appeared likely that this would be the case. In the first sessions U Ba Pe, as leader of the People's Party, headed the largest solid group with 46 members, but was unable to form a government. Dr. Ba Maw, however, with only 15 personal followers managed to form a coalition of diverse and in some respects mutually antagonistic groups. His Government fell as the result of another communal riot and was succeeded by a coalition including U Ba Pe and a newcomer in politics, U Saw. U Saw had formerly been a follower of U Ba Pe and an employee on his party newspaper. But he obtained control over the newspaper, allegedly with Japanese money, and formed a rival group, the Myo-chit (Patriotic) Party, which appealed to extremist sentiment by favouring violent rather than constitutional agitation, as he signified by posing under the style of Galon U Saw as a patron of the Galon rebels.

Under Dr. Ba Maw's Government he was sent to jail as leader of a civil disobedience campaign arising out of the communal riot. But he was a master of intrigue. Once in the Government he soon managed to oust his former patron U Ba Pe and shortly afterwards, with the support of the European group, became Prime Minister.

After separation, even more than before, the constitution had for superficial observers the semblance of democracy. The Government had a quasi-democratic form, but it was no better able than before to discharge the functions of government. There was no correspondence between form and function. Democracy, especially on the English pattern, assumes a fundamental community of national interest, but in Burma there were several distinct communities, sharply divided. Burmans had the numerical majority but they had no place in industry and commerce, and capitalist interests, European, Indian and Chinese, dominated economic and social life. In the legislature it was an obvious move in political tactics for Europeans to support the numerically weakest section of the nationalists, with the paradoxical result, inherent in the system of communal representation, that politicians could obtain office only on terms that prevented them from exercising power. The Burmans had the men but Europeans had the money and the influence, and the leader of the British mercantile community was popularly regarded as the uncrowned king of Burma. Thus the constitutional reforms from 1923 onwards, though purporting to be an experiment in parliamentary democracy, were in practice an education in political corruption. Burmans appreciated the elective legislature as a platform for airing their grievances but, with the growing disbelief in its efficacy as a means of national liberation, and in disgust with the corruption that office without power naturally engendered, nationalist leaders began to look for some alternative. The revival of Germany under Hitler suggested that leadership rather

than democracy was the key to national progress, and Japan seemed to illustrate the same principle. In striking contrast, but equally effective, was the rise of Russia under communism with its new interpretation of democracy. Some began to look to Japan and others to Russia, while not a few were willing to flirt with both.

The original flicker of interest in Japan in the early days of modern nationalism soon faded and the first sign of any Japanese interest in Burma was the foundation in 1935 of a Burma-Japan Association to promote cultural relations. Some prominent Burmans began to visit Japan, including U Saw, who was believed to be in receipt of a Japanese subsidy for his newspaper and to have negotiated with the Japanese for recognition of his Government if they invaded Burma. Dr. Ba Maw, in his reaction against the working of quasi-democratic forms of government in Burma, was attracted by the leadership principle, and in 1940 U Saw was able to avenge his imprisonment in 1938 by sending Dr. Ba Maw to jail on the charge of seditiously aspiring to dictatorship. It seems doubtful, however, whether there is any foundation for the charge, promulgated during the war, that Dr. Ba Maw had promised to assist a Japanese invasion. Others in touch with Japan were a few men who had been associated with a younger group, the *thakins*. In 1931 the style *thakin* (master), formerly the usual term of address to Europeans, was assumed by some lads at or connected with the university to show that they claimed equality with Europeans. They grew rapidly in numbers and influence. They were enthusiastic for the diffusion of enlightenment and strongly attacked the prevalence of corruption in public life and Government service; their political objective was unconditional independence as soon as possible by any possible means. They were attracted by the Japanese catchword of co-prosperity, and most of them were not averse from Japanese assistance in obtaining independence, but only a

few, and these dissidents from the main group, seem to have been in touch with the Japanese. The Japanese onslaught on China repelled them and their warmest sympathies lay rather with Russia. None of them, however, knew anything about Russia except from books, and none had ever come into contact with Russians or other practising communists. Communism attracted them because it provided a plausible explanation of foreign capital in Burma and seemed to offer a short-cut to independence. But they were offended by its doctrinaire repudiation of religion. Burma was closely identified with Buddhism; they were Buddhists, some of them very devout Buddhists, and they saw that communism could make no headway in Burma unless it came to terms with Buddhism. Only two or three went so far as to call themselves communists, and even these had no practical acquaintance with its working. Before the war communism in Burma was purely academic.

When war threatened the East Dr. Ba Maw was in jail, and the Government impartially directed the arrest of all those, thakins and others, who were thought likely to cause trouble. U Saw, still Prime Minister, visited England to treat for independence. His overtures were rejected and on his return journey he was arrested on suspicion of complicity with the Japanese and interned in Africa; other members of his party were sent to join the Ba Maw and thakin groups in jail. A few nationalist leaders, however, including Aung San, evaded arrest. Apparently Aung San had made no previous arrangements with the Japanese, but came across them, more or less accidentally, in Indo-China and was sent to Japan for military training. Early in 1942, when the Japanese invaded Burma, he returned with them at the head of a small Burmese contingent of thirty men trained under him. It is at this point that Thakin Nu takes up his tale.

Under foreign rule economic progress had sapped the



foundation of social order. The Government rested on British prestige, the economic power of the European community and the immense reserve of British military strength. British rule was inherently unstable and the inevitable sequel of its collapse was anarchy. The mob, with no leaders of their own people to restrain them, and joined by the criminals released from jail when the Government as it retreated withdrew the prison staff, broke out in a wild orgy of loot, directed especially against the Burman officials who had been left behind. By May the Japanese army was able to assume control and restored most of the officials in a civil administration under Thakin Tun Oke, a dissident thakin who had escaped to Japan and been trained in Japanese administrative methods. The Japanese, however, soon recognized the superior ability of Dr. Ba Maw and decided in May that he should take over the civil government under the military command. This arrangement took effect in August 1942. Burmans were still restive and on 1 August 1943 Burma was granted nominal independence under Dr. Ba Maw as *Adipati*, or Dictator.

Burmans did not want the Japanese any more than they wanted the English. Almost certainly practically all those with any knowledge of affairs preferred the English to the Japanese because of Japanese oppression in China. But only a few had any knowledge of affairs. There was great respect for Japan as the champion of Asia, and a hope if not an expectation that the Japanese would welcome Burma as an independent member in the co-prosperity sphere. Among Burmans in general the only active opponents of Japan were those thakins who had been attracted by communism. From the earliest days of the Japanese invasion some of these went underground and took to guerilla warfare against the invading forces. Others printed and distributed anti-Japanese leaflets and opened contact in India both with the British military authorities and with Indian communist leaders. One aspect of the resistance

movement was the reconciliation between Burmese and Karens. Under British rule the Karens, formerly a wild hill folk, came down into the plains. Mostly they adopted Buddhism and the Burmese way of life; there was some intermarriage and the difference of racial origin lost much of its political significance. But a strong minority, about one-fifth, who became Christians were trained by the missionaries to keep aloof from Burmese and other heathen. In the rebellion of 1886 the missionaries induced the Government to enrol Karens to attack their Burmese neighbours, and from that time onwards Karens were recruited for the army and military police from which the Burmese were excluded. Not unnaturally, when the Japanese invaded Burma, the Burmese were suspicious of Karen loyalty to the nationalist cause, and during the anarchy that prevailed on the collapse of British rule some Burmese turned savagely on the Karens in the delta and aroused lasting resentment by their excesses. Thakin Nu describes how the Burmese leaders gradually won the confidence of the Karens and induced them to join in common resistance against the Japanese.

In the process of reconciliation the two Burmese protagonists were Aung San, the head of the army, and the communist leader, Than Tun. The army had been created by Aung San by the expansion of his original small contingent into a force of several thousand undisciplined spontaneous volunteers which became known as the Burma Independence Army. When the Japanese postponed the grant of independence, Than Tun and other communist leaders induced the Independence Army to mutiny and it was accordingly suppressed and reorganized as the Burma Defence Army, still under General Aung San. His command of the army and his close contact with Thakin Nu, the confidant of Dr. Ba Maw, and with Than Tun, the brains of the communist movement, enabled him to make his influence felt in all sections of the resistance

movement and to organize a secret meeting in August 1944 when all the forces of resistance adopted a common plan. This was the beginning of the end. The downfall of the Japanese was already in sight, and in February 1945, on the advance of the allies into Burma, Aung San came out into the open and transferred his army to their side. By the end of April the Japanese had to withdraw from Rangoon to Moulmein and only then do we get any glimpse of the fighting, as the Burmese Government retreated with the Japanese. In this retreat Thakin Nu was accompanied by his wife and children. The long-drawn strain of the war, with all its death and destruction, and the perils of the flight shattered his wife's nerves and brought her to the verge of collapse. Finally, on 14 August, Dr. Ba Maw imparted to him as a top secret that the Japanese would surrender on the following day. Thakin Nu could not resist the temptation to relieve his wife's distress by whispering the news. She was delighted; not so much, he explains, because of relief at the end of this terrible war as because for the first time he told her a close political secret.

Here Thakin Nu's story ends. The British Government returned and Dr. Ba Maw was driven into exile, and the request of the nationalist leaders that he and his Cabinet should be granted an amnesty was ignored. Eventually, however, he came back and U Saw also returned from Africa. The newly reinstated Government had learned nothing during its exile in India and, by vainly attempting to set the clock back, strengthened the alliance between the nationalists under Aung San and the communists under Than Tun. Finally, the Government in England, by recognizing the claim of Burma to independence, removed the imminent danger that nationalism would succumb to communism. Thakin So resumed guerilla warfare and Than Tun broke off from Aung San. Almost immediately Aung San, Thakin Mya and other nationalist

leaders were assassinated, and Thakin Nu was left to guide his country. U Saw was executed for instigating the assassination of Aung San. But unwise counsels provoked rebellion, first among the Than Tun group of communists, then among some of Aung San's volunteer force and also elements in the army with communist sympathies, and finally, most deplorably and unnecessarily, a strong section of the Karens was deluded into taking up arms against the Government. The earlier pioneers of independence, U Ba Pe and Dr. Ba Maw, disgruntled at being suspected, maintain an attitude of critical resentment. But Thakin Nu by strength of character, courage and goodwill has brought the country through trials that at one time threatened complete disruption. This book helps one to understand how he has done it. As he is careful to point out, it is not a history. But it is a contribution to history. And the admirable tone and temper of the writing should tell the reader something of Burmese civilization.

Finally, a word of acknowledgment is due to my old, though still young, friend, U Khant, who, while at the University, started life as an assistant in my bookshop, the Burma Book Club, Ltd., and who is now Member of Parliament for Pantanaw; I am greatly indebted to him for help in the translation, and especially for explaining allusions to incidents in connection with the Japanese. And another word is due also to his brother, U Thant, Secretary to Government in the Ministry of Information, for the care and trouble he has taken in compiling the 'Who's Who' of notable persons mentioned in the text.

J. S. FURNIVALL

30 October 1951

## CHAPTER I

# THE JAPANESE INVASION

(1942, February to April)

EVERYONE in Burma who had any interest in politics knew all about the Japanese. They knew that in Japan a handful of war-lords oppressed millions of the people; they knew that in China the Japanese were committing murder and robbery and rape; they knew that Tanaka and his followers were planning to conquer the whole world. Yet apart from a very few men like Didok U Ba Cho, Thakin So and Than Tun, they refused really to believe all these things. This can easily be explained.

From the first arrival of the Portuguese in India the lack of unity among Asiatic peoples enabled Europeans with their greater scientific knowledge to dominate all the countries of the East. At that time Oriental peoples saw very few Europeans; they were overawed by their western science, their discipline and practical ability, and took them for superior beings. But gradually western prestige declined. From the opening of the Suez Canal many more westerners came to the East, and the people came to know more about them. In 1905 an eastern people, the Japanese, defeated a western people, the Russians. In the first World War Asians fought shoulder to shoulder with Europeans and proved themselves as good. And a study of Asian history revealed the glories of the past and showed that at one time Asians had been victorious in Europe.

These things made us impatient of western rule and all we wanted was a leader. The Japanese seemed to be the

only eastern people that could hold its own against the West, and we came to look confidently to Japan for leadership. So people made excuses for the Japanese. 'There was probably some reason for what they did; the various charges might not be true, and in any case it was only to Japan that we could look for freedom from western rule.' So Burmans were very reluctant to believe anti-Japanese propaganda. They told U Ba Cho to stop preaching when he insisted on the evils of Japanese fascism, and they laughed at Thakin So and Than Tun as unpractical, academic. And, as it was the westerners who were most active in exposing Japanese fascism, many people believed that these men had been bribed by western imperialists and capitalists whose real object was to prevent eastern lands from obtaining independence.

In 1941 when the war spread to Asia many of our nationalist leaders were in jail. Thakin So, Thakin Kyaw Sein, Thakin Ba Hein, Thakin Mya Thwin and I were in the Mandalay Central Jail, and along with us were many leaders of all parties, Thakin, Dama and Wunthanu. The whole jail was agog for war news. Many nationalists were rejoicing in the idea that the sooner the English had to quit the sooner we should be out of jail. But every day the jail fluttered with all kinds of disquieting rumours and gossip. 'In Tharrawaddy Jail all the political prisoners have been blown to bits with bombs.' 'In Prome Jail they've all been machine-gunned.' Some of us believed these stories and were badly frightened. Others wondered if the English would take all the nationalist leaders with them when they cleared out to India. Others were glad to think that they would be all right with the Japanese who would welcome us as allies. And some were glad merely because they would soon be rid of British rule. Meanwhile Thakin So and his group were trying to spread the idea that if the fascists were to win, men would lose their manhood, and they were urging everyone to help the democratic side without

reserve. But it was like a lone voice crying out from the depth of a thick jungle, and some people who could not grasp Thakin So's idea accused him of being a British agent.

Ordinarily Mandalay Jail holds fifteen hundred convicts. But, as the English retreated, they brought with them some of the political prisoners from Lower Burma and crowded them into Mandalay Jail together with the regular jail-birds, so that, some three months before the withdrawal from Mandalay, it already housed over three thousand prisoners. It was no easy job to find room and food and sanitary arrangements for such a crowd. The prisoners almost had to sleep on top of one another; there were two hundred political prisoners in a cell that had formerly held no more than about twenty convicts, and at night it was almost impossible to stir hand or foot.

Naturally with a lot of men there is a lot of filth. When there is filth there are flies. Where there are flies there is sure to be an outbreak of some disease or other. And before long there was an epidemic of cholera with three or four men dying daily, and things went from bad to worse. You might think that the jail staff would try to stop this. Not a bit! On 19 February, when the first Japanese bombs fell about two miles from the jail, the whole prison staff from top to bottom bolted in all directions to take refuge wherever they could. With no one to look after the jail the cholera had a free run and conditions, already pretty bad, got worse and worse. And things were still worse when the planes came.

At that time Burmans had such faith in the Japanese that when the Japanese bombers came they would not take cover in the shelters. Some tore off their shirts and waved a welcome; they sang and danced and clapped their hands, and shouted and turned somersaults as if they did not care a curse what happened. It was not merely bad hats and old lags who went on like this, but even many nationalist

leaders behaved in the same manner. I tried to make them see sense. 'It's all very well, friends,' I said, 'but even supposing you are right in thinking that your pals the Japanese won't bomb you, the English bombers may say "See how keen these people are for the Japs to come; let them have it." And when they drop their bombs you will all be killed for nothing. Don't be so rash.' But when I preached like this they jeered at me for being so timid while claiming to be a nationalist leader. The prisoners, too, from the jails in Insein, Rangoon and other parts of Lower Burma backed them up, because they had seen lots of Japanese planes already. 'They don't bomb Burmans,' they said. 'Why, every day they kept on flying over Insein Jail. Don't be so frightened, man.' And they took the other side against us.

The hottest day of all was the 8th of April when the Japanese bombed Mandalay for the third time. With a huge black cloud of smoke rising to the sky all round, you might have thought the whole large city was covered by a big black umbrella. Although it was only ten o'clock in the morning, the smoke was so thick that not a single ray of sunshine could pierce through, and everywhere in the town it was as dark as night. Meanwhile quite close to the jail one building after another was crashing down. The continual bombing all round was enough to strike terror into any ordinary mortal, but the Burmans in the jail who placed so much faith in the Japanese went on laughing, and clapping their hands, and waving a welcome with their shirts.

I dare say we others might have followed their example. But our group from Rangoon, even before leaving Insein Jail, had been drilled in communist catchwords day and night by dear old Thakin So. He exorcized those who were possessed with such ideas and we learned to do just what he told us. So, when the Japanese bombers came, we went down with Thakin So to the shelters and took refuge.



Otherwise we might well have been found among the shirt-waving crowd.

The bombing was not the only thing that made the 8th of April memorable. For on that day the Indian contractor, who used to bring our food, stopped work and ran off to Mandalay. From that day onwards we had nothing to eat but dry peas. Dry peas may be good enough for daily bread in ordinary times, but it's certainly not the kind of stuff to live on with cholera all round. However, it is worse to die of hunger today than of cholera tomorrow, so we forced ourselves to eat it. Incidentally, there is one thing worth mentioning about the cholera. It did not attack those who were inoculated. It only attacked those who bribed the doctor because they were frightened of inoculation, or who dodged him and hid themselves. And then, in this month of April, when we were all terrified with the fear of disease and the fear of bombs and fearsome rumours all round us, I heard a voice call out, 'There are some visitors for Thakin Nu.' This cheered me up, and was as pleasant as the cry of 'Water' to a thirsty traveller in a sandy desert.

It did not matter that I had not the vaguest idea who the visitor might be. Any visitor would be welcome at such a time in such a life in such a jail. So I went joyfully into the Superintendent's room to see my visitor. And when I saw him my delight gave way to astonishment. It was the last man I expected to meet. It was none other than General Wang with a few companions. I had met General Wang in Rangoon at the very beginning of the war. Then not long afterwards I met him four or five times when I went as one of the Goodwill Mission to Chungking, and learned that he was a very important person in the Chinese Government. After we had exchanged greetings I was delighted to hear him say that he had come to take me off to Chungking where we would be able to work together. From the look on his face I

could see that he thought this would be a pleasant surprise to me and hoped that I would be as pleased as he was. For my part, since I first set eyes on him, I had been wondering whether he was going to suggest something of this kind.

This was in fact the kind of thing that I had frequently discussed with Thakin So and his group. Their answer was that if fascist principles spread throughout the world all human life would lose its purpose, and therefore everyone should help the democratic cause without reserve. But I had always stubbornly opposed the phrase 'without reserve'. As it was just this phrase 'without reserve' that seemed to be implied by General Wang's offer, I did not respond so enthusiastically as he had expected. He was very astonished, and for a short time remained silent. Then some Chinese General who had come along with him suddenly broke in and remarked angrily, 'It's all along of your thakin crowd helping the Japanese in Lower Burma that so many of us have lost our lives.' But General Wang turned on him sharply and spoke to him in Chinese. They went on exchanging remarks for some time with General Wang talking more and more harshly and abruptly. Finally the other General gave in and said no more.

General Wang turned to me and said pleasantly, 'Thakin Nu, the cunning of the Japanese is now quite clear in Lower Burma. They said that they would grant Burma independence, but now they have got here there is no more talk of independence. As you have been in jail you probably do not know anything about this.'

'Oh, yes, we do,' I said. 'Every day almost we get news in secret letters from outside, which tell us a lot about Japanese trickiness.'

'Now, do believe me. We know the Japanese very well. What they are doing now in Lower Burma is only a beginning. It will be much worse as time goes on. So it is the duty of every Burman to take part in turning the

Japanese out of Burma, and it is the youth of Burma in which I have most confidence.'

'General Wang, I think you may have a wrong idea about me. Because I hum and haw about what you have said, I dare say you think that I support the Japanese. Isn't that right?'

The General just smiled.

'Just to clear your mind of any doubt,' I said, 'let me try to make my position clear. Here is a Resolution that was passed in a Conference of our people in jail. I'll just give you the gist of it.

'The English proclaim that they entered this great war to protect small countries and to defend their independence against oppressors. Burma is a small country. Why not begin by giving it independence? If you cannot grant independence now, promise to grant it as soon as the war is over. If you proclaim this now, we will help the English side against the fascist brigands who threaten the independence of small nations. If you do not make this proclamation, we will do all we can to hinder your war effort in whatever way we can.

'There you are. That is a summary of our Resolution. You will note that it contains two main points. Proclaim our independence now or promise it as soon as the war is over. Proclaim it and we will help you, and if you don't proclaim it we will worry you.

'Up to the present the English have never proclaimed that they will grant Burma independence. So, in the terms of our Resolution, we do all we can to injure the English. As you are allied with them against Japan, it is a bit awkward for us to help you.'

General Wang seemed quite to realize the difficulty of my position, and without attempting any reply continued to stare straight ahead and quietly nodded.

'I don't think there is much need for you to explain the nasty ways of the Japanese. That was clear enough from what I said to you when I was leaving Chungking.

And in my book *Gandularit* I spoke out pretty plainly. And then there was the translation of *The Japanese Spy* that our Red Dragon Book Society published. So you can well believe that I know quite enough about the character of the Japanese.'

But while I was talking, General Wang seemed to be thinking over something else. Then he said with a smile, 'Thakin Nu, you are not looking very fit, and there is this outbreak of cholera in the jail. So don't worry about helping us if you think it would be awkward. But you ought to be looking after your health. Why not come along with me to Chungking just for a change? The fact is that what really brought me here was the anxiety of your friend U Ba Cho who wants to hear how you are getting on.'

This touched me keenly and I almost felt like shedding tears that U Ba Cho and General Wang were so greatly concerned for me. Then he asked after my family; if they were on this side of the lines, he offered to take them with him in the plane straight away. This also touched me keenly and I replied, 'Why not try this? As soon as you leave the jail go straight to the Governor, Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith, and make him understand that it is not yet too late. Press him to cable the British Government to announce that it will grant Burma independence at the end of the war. The duplicity of the Japanese is clearly revealed and the whole country is in despair. If just at this time the British proclamation is published the whole country will turn round and attack the Japanese. I'll speak quite plainly. Even if the British clear out and don't want to fight, our patriotic youth will join up with the Chinese troops in guerilla warfare against Japan. If we do that the Japanese will have to clear out.'

'That's the spirit, man!' said General Wang delighted.

'If you can manage it, get him to send a wire today. Don't waste any time. If the reply comes tomorrow, we'll

publish it and then get to work immediately. Just think of this, General. If I haven't even got this little proclamation to show, how could I possibly face the country?'

But I was acting like a novice at draughts who thinks only of taking his opponent's men without thinking what may happen to his own. It was all so simple; General Wang speaks to the Governor; the Governor cables to England; a wire comes back; the Burma youth and Chinese army join up to fight the Japanese; the war ends, and Burma becomes independent. And there you are! Like a man with a half-baked plan, I was so taken with my own idea that I never thought how many steps it would take or how many obstacles would spring up at every step. But when I came to think over the matter, I saw the practical difficulties. Supposing General Wang spoke to the Governor, would he agree to send the cable? And if he thought fit to cable, wouldn't he have done it when the Japanese first entered Rangoon instead of waiting to be told? And supposing the Governor cabled, would the British Government wire back its approval? And if it approved wouldn't it have made such a proclamation already at the time of the Atlantic Charter Treaty when the war started? And when I began to think of all these things, the glow of my enthusiasm faded and I pondered gloomily.

'Well,' I said, 'you may as well speak to the Governor, and if things pan out as I suggested, so much the better. And it will do the Chinese a good turn among us Burmans.'

If you can't manage a thing one way, try another. So I hit upon another idea. It was just this. 'There is a gang of communists in jail. If you give them a chance to fight the fascists they will go for them "without reserve". Why not let them out of jail?' So I suggested that General Wang should mention this idea to the Governor.

'Who are these communists?'

I saw that he was rather hesitating, and I already knew

all about the Chungking people and the communists, so I could pretty well guess what was in his mind.

'Well, it's like this, General. If you want to take me you will have to take them. These men are my professors and teachers. It was they who convinced me that no man could live as a human being unless this fascist gang was broken, and that if the fascists win, it is all up with mankind. Even six months ago they wrote to the Governor for him to let them out of jail to fight for democracy against the fascists. But, for some reason or other, I can't think why, they have never heard a single word from him.'

'Dear, dear!' said General Wang, looking rather interested.

'And then, too, these people have a good deal of influence among Burmans. In fact, if I come along by myself without them, I shan't be able to give much help to the democratic side.'

'There's something in that. Are they all here in this jail?'

'One of them is in the Monywa Jail.'

'Who are they all?'

'In this jail there is a man Thakin So. The man in Monywa Jail is Thakin Than Tun. If you have the time, why not see Thakin So for a moment?'

The General sent a warder to call Thakin So, and I suggested that he should also see Thakin Kyaw Sein and Thakin Ba Hein as they all belonged to the same group. So he sent for the other two men also. Before long Thakin So and the others arrived. It was just time for lunch, so he pressed some milk and biscuits and melons on us and we all had a meal without being at all stiff.

'General,' I said, 'you should think yourself lucky to meet these men. If we were attacked by the fascist dacoits, while I was still bargaining how best I could get out of it, these men would shoot first and ask afterwards.'

Thakin So then briefly explained his plan for fighting the fascists. General Wang seemed pretty well satisfied and after about half an hour he got ready to go to the Governor. Then, just as he was going out of the door, he repeated, 'Don't worry, Thakin Nu. I will press the Governor very seriously to send that cable.'

A day or two after the visit of General Wang, U Ba Cho and a man called William Tseng came to call on me. William Tseng was one of the men who had come on the Goodwill Mission to Chungking and in China we had become quite good friends.

U Ba Cho told me that General Wang had spoken to the Governor and that the Governor had cabled to England. I was very pleased to hear this. And he went on to say that the Governor also agreed to send Thakin So and the others to Chungking. We were to leave in about a couple of days. He also asked about the cholera as he had heard it was very serious. 'Well,' he said, 'don't forget to cling fast to the Precious Trinity: the Buddha, the Law and the Religious Order.'

I asked him about Than Tun, and was told that he would be brought from Monywa Jail.

'And that reminds me,' he said, 'Dr. Ba Maw is not in Mogok Jail. He has disappeared, and the Government is hunting for him everywhere.'

'Now I understand! General Wang was asking me if I knew Dr. Ba Maw well. So that's why!'

After we had gone on talking for a while U Ba Cho and the others got up to go. U Ba Cho took out fifty rupees that he happened to have with him. Strictly speaking, according to the Jail Regulations, no one may give money to a prisoner. But if you fix it up with the warders you can bring in as much as you like. William Tseng also seemed quite distressed at my condition and took a hundred-rupee note out of his pocket to give me. But I did not want to take more money than U Ba Cho had given me so I would

only accept a couple of duck's eggs that he had brought from China. When I got back to the jail I arranged a secret code by which we could keep in touch with one another in the work ahead of us and various other matters. In a couple of days, as U Ba Cho had said, an English officer with his men came for us, and we put our things together and set off. The other prisoners did not understand what was up and came crowding round to watch us. We were to sleep the first night at Maymyo, the next at Lashio and then go on to Chungking by air. We were not told where we were going, but managed to get it out of the officer in charge by casual questions and piecing his answers together.

Our faces, our voices and our behaviour showed how delighted we were to be out of jail. Thakin So seemed especially glad that the plans which he had formed throughout the past year for downing the fascists seemed at last on the point of bearing fruit. As for me, you may say that I was selfish, but I am bound to confess that I was so glad to get out of the fever-stricken jail that I had not a thought about the future.

And I must just mention the behaviour of the officer who came for us. Everything looked at its darkest for the English and you might have thought they would behave decently to anyone who took their side. But as we were leaving the jail he shouted rudely to Thakin Kyaw Sein, 'Are you going to keep us waiting here all day?' And that was in front of a crowd of prisoners who were backing up the Japanese. I expect they were all jeering at us 'There you are! See how the English treat even people who go cap in hand and say "Sir" to them.' We were lucky if they were not all laughing at us. And again when we got to the bus. It was just a Black Maria for convicts, and as soon as we got inside a policeman bolted the door and stationed himself on guard outside with a revolver in his belt. But Thakin So seemed to be so keen on fighting the



fascists that apparently he took no notice of these little annoyances.

We had got just near the foot of the hill to Maymyo when we saw a car coming in the opposite direction. As it came up to us the officer inside waved his hand for us to stop. A Burman from our car went to him, and when he had received instructions we turned back along the road to Mandalay. We could not find out from any one what had gone wrong and all the officials in our car just kept mum. When we called in at a police station in Mandalay we heard the officer in charge of our car tell another official that the whole road was blocked with troops and that it was quite impossible to get through. But that was all we got to know about it.

So our trip to Chungking petered out at the foot of Maymyo hill, and we were back at the cholera-stricken Central Jail in Mandalay.

Next morning the whole jail was buzzing with the news that the Japanese had cut the great Burma Road. So we understood what the officer had said the day before about the road ahead being blocked with soldiers. In the afternoon all the prisoners in the jail were released except the three hundred or so political prisoners. A little later an English army officer, a stuck-up-looking man with a big moustache, came and ordered all the political prisoners to assemble in the jail engine-room. This gave rise to all sorts of speculations. Some thought the English would carry us off with them to India. Some were afraid that the jail had been handed over to the army and that all the political prisoners were going to be 'looked after'. At that time it was very unpleasant to hear that people were going to be 'looked after' or 'put away'. We were all so jumpy that anyone, however incredulous, who heard such words immediately thought he was as good as in his coffin. So we all took very good care to keep away from people who talked like that. While we were waiting for the officer

to return, some light-fingered gentry who had ransacked the store-room came round distributing boxes of matches. By six o'clock, after we had been hanging around for a couple of hours, the officer had not turned up again, so we went back to our sleeping-quarters. Next day, except for our two or three hundred political prisoners, there was no one left in the great jail that on the day before had been buzzing with activity like bees round a pot of jam.

Thakin So and I and a few other leaders found a quiet corner where we could talk over things by ourselves. I suggested that the English were trying to arrange to send us off to India. Thakin So replied that it would not be so easy. When an army is retreating it wants all the motor-cars, all the boats and all the planes that it can get, to take off the men and equipment. These things are much more important, and, however much they might want to take us with them, he thought they could not manage it, and would have to leave us behind.

'Then what do you suggest we ought to do?'

'For my part, as soon as we get out, I'd like to hunt up a Chinese regiment and go with it to China.'

'That is a good idea. If we want to join up with a Chinese regiment we should get into touch with U Ba Cho. He would easily be able to manage it.'

All the others agreed, and Thakin So asked which of us should go to China. I suggested that they had better go and leave me to carry on the work in Burma where I should be more useful.

But the truth of the matter is that, although I suggested that I should stay behind to work in Burma, I was really thinking of nothing but getting back home. That was the kind of thing that I had often come across from my first taking up politics. For instance, there is a plan for a boycott. Some men are afraid of being arrested; some are afraid of the police batons; and some are just shy. They all dislike the idea of joining the boycott, but they

don't like to give the true reason. One will say it's premature ; another will say it won't succeed ; or else that it would be quite a good thing, if only everyone would join. And so, with one excuse or another, between them all the boycott comes to nothing. Many a good plan has been spoiled because men of that kind put forward plausible excuses that are taken for genuine. And, if they don't get their way, they take refuge behind a barrier of letters to newspapers and periodicals, or spout away from a platform in order to kill it.

The upshot of our discussion was that we broke up into two groups. Thakin So and the others were to go to China, and Thakin Ba Hein and I were to go on with the work in Burma. All this while the English officer never appeared and time dragged very wearily as we waited the whole day long, wondering what was going to happen. And all the while the light-fingered gentry among us were plundering the store-rooms and piling up stocks of cloth, and clothing, and matches and soap and all sorts of things. Some of them were cutting sticks to use as yoke-poles to carry the stuff away when we got out of jail. They were a greedy crowd. There we were without the slightest idea about what would happen to us or whether we should leave the jail head foremost or foot foremost, all quaking and shaking. It was bad enough that any one should go scrounging like that, and much worse to think that we had to put up with such men among our fellow nationalists.

Later in the evening I was called in to advise about a piece of news that we had just heard from a couple of nationalist leaders from Shwegyin. They told us that the English and Chinese had abandoned Mandalay, and that no one was left to look after the jail but a Chief Jailer. He also happened to come from Shwegyin and had told them that he had received instructions to distribute five-days rations to all the political prisoners and then to leave the jail after locking up all the doors. 'Get him to let us out,'

we said. 'There aren't any soldiers left. All of you come from Shwegyin. If it is a matter of a little money we can fix it up.' Plans came pouring out from all the prisoners in a great flood like water streaming from a jug. Finally we agreed to promise the Chief Jailer ten thousand rupees. We could do no more than promise as we could not raise more than a hundred on the spot. But the two prisoners from Shwegyin were well-to-do men with rubber gardens, and they could well afford to guarantee five thousand. I undertook to become surety up to three thousand for the Thakin group and U Boon Swan, a leader of the Wunthanu Party, guaranteed two thousand for the Dama group. (During the Japanese time there was a good deal of discussion as to whether we ought really to pay the money, and I feel a little unhappy about not having done so.)

U Boon Swan and I were deputed to fix things up with the Chief Jailer. He said that he was not so keen about the money, but would we help him next day in removing his goods. We were quite willing to see to that. So early next morning at sunrise we all made our way to the jail gate, carrying or dragging along all our bundles and belongings. We knew quite well that, as soon as the Chief Jailer came down from his house and opened the gate, every one would be able to get out quite quietly, but many of the prisoners were pushing one another aside to get as near as possible to the little entrance gate, for all the world as if they were struggling to get to the ticket office of a picture-house. You would never have taken them for respectable nationalist leaders. U Boon Swan, Thakin So and I and a few others could not stand it, and tried to make them behave decently. But it was all no use.

After a while, when the Chief Jailer opened the inner gate and came in, everyone immediately jumped up. Some had piled such a weight on their yoke-poles that they tumbled down again. Some of the bundles were overfull and burst open. U Boon Swan could not contain himself

and asked a monk who was standing close to him, 'Why, your Reverence, are you trying to carry off all those things? I don't see how you are going to manage with them on the road. You'll have to throw the whole lot away.' It seemed as if he had to let himself go at the way some of the prisoners were carrying on. The Chief Jailer, too, would not open the gate and shouted, 'Hey! men, behave yourselves. I won't open the gate if you go on shoving like this.' And when our group backed him up, things became a little quieter. One rotten fish spoils the whole boat-load, and just because of a dozen or so rotters all politicians get a bad name.

Yet there were some men whose conduct might almost make one forget the rotters. Among the prisoners were about half a dozen who had been badly wounded and taken captive by the English in the battle of Shwedaung and were too feeble to walk. So these kind folk made up parties to carry them along on stretchers. At a time like that, when almost everyone was fighting to get away, it was certainly very praiseworthy that they should forget all about their own little bits of things and carry out the cripples. And someone came and told us that, among the men who had been carried off to the cholera shed the night before, one was still sitting up, half alive, half dead. So I and about four or five others plucked up courage to go to the cholera shed. With corpses strewn about in every compartment it was a most unpleasant sight. Fortunately the compartment with the sick man in it had not been locked, but was only bolted from the outside. We undid the bolt and opened the door, but none of us dare go in. We stood outside and explained what had been happening in the jail, and told him to try and get up. With the fear of death on him he struggled his utmost and just managed to rise. But he had been on the point of death for three or four days and his strength was exhausted. The effort was too much for him. He had not even strength enough to

tell us that he could not get up. However, we were not going to give in. We hunted around for a walking-stick and gave it to him, encouraging him to make another effort. This time, with the help of the stick and of the fear of death, he just managed to struggle up, and we got hold of a bottle of phenyl from the hospital and scrubbed him all over with twigs.

Then we had to make good our promise to the jailer. His quarters were on the top story of the jail and we had to carry all his goods to a motor-car outside. He must have been a greedy fellow. With everyone scrambling to get out, he made us carry down everything, all his pots and pans and bits and pieces. It was all very well for him to be greedy, but Thakin So and I were the sturdiest among our lot, and we had to carry all the heaviest things. It was a tiring job. And that was not the end of it. His car would not start and we had to push it from the jail gate right out of the town. Some of our youngsters were angry with him and hid some of his things when he was not looking. But he caught them and lost his temper and began to shout and storm. We all had to coax him just as if he were a naughty child. And we had to go on pushing his car for a mile or so until we got out of Mandalay. There is a short-cut out of the town about half the distance of the motor road. When we had nearly reached the end of the motor road we caught sight again of the sick man stumbling along the short-cut with the help of his stick. This made us all forget how tired we were.

## CHAPTER II

### JAPANESE MILITARY RULE

(1942, May to July)

WE wanted to get into touch with U Ba Cho at Shwebo, sixty miles away, and hoped to get help from Dr. Set, who we believed to be close by in Sagaing. So four of us left the others in a little village about five miles out of Mandalay and went to look for Dr. Set. As we had been told that the British troops and some Burmese officials were still in that neighbourhood, we were afraid that we should miss him and fall into the hands of the British. After taking so much trouble we did not want to be re-arrested before we had accomplished anything. And we also feared that the soldiers, instead of sending us to India, might take us for Japanese spies sent to gather information about the military situation. You can imagine how frightened we were when I tell you that, on seeing three or four men staring at us, we decided offhand that they must be policemen. They just greeted us in the ordinary way by asking where we were going. I happened to be in front and was so confused that I could only answer, 'I don't know, I don't know; ask the man behind,' and went straight on, and the men behind me also, one after another, merely said, 'I don't know, I don't know; ask the man behind.' However, the last man had time to collect his thoughts and answer rationally.

Apart from answering questions like that all day long we met with no difficulties. But we were so horribly afraid that we answered even ordinary country folk quite at random. When at length we reached a monastery where we

could stay the night we agreed laughingly that dacoits and bad hats were only caught because they were frightened of the police. The others left me at the monastery and went on to look for Dr. Set but, as he had left Sagaing with an English Deputy Commissioner who was a friend of his, they could not get the help they wanted. So we went back to the village near Mandalay where we had left our comrades. The whole village and the neighbouring villages, boys and girls, old men and old women, were in a state of great excitement. Some were laden up with bananas and melons and all kinds of fruit; some had bowls of rice on their heads. Soon three or four monks appeared, and they all formed up into a procession in double file. Two aged dames distributed sprigs of *thabyeban* (eugenia) to every one. At last Burma was to be free. And three or four old ladies, with scarves bound round their breasts as if they were going to the pagoda, and with tears streaming down their faces, were dancing madly and feebly chanting the ancient song:

‘Tend the *thabyeban* with cool water,  
The garland of victory, tend it with cool water.’

All were exulting in the thought that Burma would be free, and as the grand old song resounded throughout the countryside no one could hear it without trembling with emotion.

This can readily be understood. The whole air was breathing rumours. ‘The Japanese are our great friends.’ ‘When a Japanese meets a Burman he greets him with our own war cry.’ ‘The Japanese will die for Burma’s freedom.’ ‘A Burman prince is coming as a leader in the Japanese army.’ They all firmly believed the messages scattered down from aeroplanes and broadcast on the wireless that the Japanese were coming to help Burma, and rumour had swollen a handful of hope until it overflowed the basket. Now they were off to welcome their great ally



the Japanese, and though it was close on noon under the scorching sun of Mandalay, the poor people were so keen to greet their great ally that they did not even notice the heat.

We met them again in the afternoon about four o'clock. They were no longer marching in a procession but limping along in clumps of three or four. Their faces were no longer joyful and exultant as in the morning, and they seemed quite shy of facing the people who had stayed at home. When they came up to us we asked what had happened. One of them replied in a surly tone. 'Don't talk about it. We expected the Japanese commander to be very thankful for our bowls of rice, but all he did was to take his hand out of his trouser pocket and give us a hard slap in the face.' And then he suddenly broke out laughing.

And another man chipped in, 'Talk about rough treatment! After he had slapped our faces he made us drag logs and draw water; drag, draw; drag, draw. It almost broke our backs.' Then they all burst out laughing. And another man followed, 'It is all right to ask people to help you when there is something to be done, but they might as well have given us a word of thanks. All they did was to collar all the rice and curry, and not only the food but the bowls as well.' And again they broke out into laughter. And I thought to myself whatever one may say there is nothing much wrong with Burmans who can see the funny side of things even in the most unpleasant circumstances. And from that time onwards the news spread like wildfire from one village to another that the Japanese were a tough crowd.

After a day or two we moved on to Kanbaing village where we met Tet-pongyi Thein Pe and Kyaw Nyein. They had already started the resistance movement against the Japanese, and showed us a leaflet which they had printed on a hand-press. After revising our plans Thakin

So and the others set off in a small car to find U Ba Cho at Shwebo, but I stayed on in Kanbaing.

Soon afterwards I went down to Rangoon, where a group of nationalist leaders under Thakin Tun Oke was making preparations for a Provisional Government. Circulating time, as they say, avenges itself with interest, and seven days in one existence becomes seventy times seven in the next. That was certainly true in our case. For Golden Valley, which had formerly been occupied by the men we denounced so violently as toadies of the English, had now become the headquarters of our own men gathered together from far and wide. Here I put up in the house of Bo Let Ya, who, however, was not at home as he had gone to Upper Burma. The same evening I had a talk with Thakin Chit and asked him about all that had been going on.

‘It’s quite true,’ he said, ‘that the Japanese have cheated us. Before they came to Burma they promised to declare it independent as soon as they arrived. In Tavoy they promised to make the proclamation in Moulmein; in Moulmein, they would make it in Rangoon. But since they got to Rangoon there has not been a single word about it. They promised all sorts of things, but have not kept a single promise. Things are none too easy even for our own group. Day and night we are in a constant state of alarm lest the Kempetai should drag us off at any moment.’

‘What is this Kempetai that people talk about?’ I asked.

‘It’s just their military police. And it’s a real bad lot. Go and report anyone and they straightaway arrest him. And it is no fun being arrested. They hang you up to a beam with your hands behind your back; they tie your feet together with a rope and stand you upside down; they bash you on both sides with an iron rod; or they pump water into your mouth until your belly bulges out and then jump on it.’

‘Hmph!’

‘Oh, all that’s nothing. They fasten your testicles in a machine and twist them.’

‘Good lord!’

‘They slosh you with boiling water. They pull out your finger-nails with pincers. They——’

‘But surely they can’t treat men just like brute beasts.’

‘Thakin Nu, it won’t be long before you see and hear it all yourself.’

When he told me all this, cold shivers ran down my back.

‘And when they have done all this, if it turns out that you are not to blame, they just say, “Very well, be off with you.” If you find a very soft-hearted policeman, he may make one or two polite remarks when he releases you, as much as to say, “I’m sorry.”’

‘But what about our own group?’ I asked; ‘has this Kempetai arrested any of them?’

‘As I said just now; even among our own men we are in constant dread day and night of being dragged off at any moment.’

‘Oh!’

‘And there is another thing that is very bad. We Burmans are a set of rotters. If you so much as look at a man, he’ll run off to this Kempetai . . .’ Then, laughing, ‘Are you on bad terms with anyone, Thakin Nu? Just go to the Kempetai and say that he is anti-Japanese, or else that he is a communist. It does not matter which you prefer. It’s all quite simple.’

‘But are our men really such rotters?’

‘There again; you’ll soon find out for yourself. Men like that are laying traps for the Kempetai every day. And don’t think it’s only the lower classes. People in the upper classes are even worse at setting traps.’

‘If it’s like that, things are in a bad way with Burma.’

Yet it is all very well to exclaim in a moment of anger

that Burmans are a set of rotters. It is just the same with all slave peoples, whether they are Chinese, Indians or Burmans. Their minds are always depraved. It is a human weakness to stir up trouble, and it is the natural lot of subject peoples that men with nasty perverted minds curry favour with their masters, fonder of their aunt than their mother, as the saying goes.

The next day I was summoned to attend a meeting to discuss the formation of a government along lines approved by the Japanese Military Command. Some Burman leaders wanted to proclaim our independence and set up a Republic. But the Japanese army would only allow a 'Preparatory Committee' that was in effect little more than a committee to facilitate pacification. With so wide a difference between what we asked and what they would sanction, the disagreement between our leaders was so acute that the meeting had to be adjourned without coming to any decision.

Not long afterwards Thakin Mya called me to meet Bo Mo-gyo. The Japanese name of this Bo Mo-gyo was Colonel Suzuki. On enquiry we found that he had got his name from the saying 'A thunderbolt (Mo-gyo) will strike the palace'. While in Mandalay we had heard all sorts of rumours that he was a son of the Myingun Prince, that he was of royal descent and so on. But the Mo-gyo that we met was pure undiluted Japanese, short, thin and with a light moustache. He had rather a loud voice and even when he spoke quietly he seemed to be shouting. As soon as we saw him he struck us as well disposed towards Burmans, and if that was not the case he was a pretty good actor.

At our first meeting he started off by saying, 'Don't be worried about independence. Independence is not the kind of thing you can get through begging for it from other people. You should proclaim it yourselves. The Japanese refuse to give it? Very well, then; tell them that you

will cross over to some place like Twante and proclaim independence and set up your own government. What's the difficulty about that? If they start shooting, you just shoot back.' When we got back to Thakin Mya's house we had a good look round to see that we were all alone and then began to talk over what he had said. 'What about this man?' I asked. 'Do you think that he's sincere?' Thakin Mya said that he talked in just the same blunt way to every one he met.

'My opinion is that he was fishing to find out what we thought.'

'Well,' replied Thakin Mya, 'we did not give much away. Even if he had been as wise as his grandfather he could not have got much out of it.'

About three days later we heard that he wanted to see us again. So we both went along and, after chatting for a while, Mo-gyo said, 'What is all this that is going on now? I hear that you and the others hold a meeting every night, and that the house is guarded with Burman soldiers and no one else is allowed to enter it.' This startled me a bit. It was half true and half false. The house that we were meeting in belonged to Bo Let Ya, and at that time sentries were posted at the houses of all the senior officers. At any time of the day or night any friend could come along and we talked about anything that cropped up with no particular object. But some spy of the Japanese, seeing our friends come and go, and the sentries posted, must have reported to them that we were plotting an insurrection. I explained the circumstances to him and said that, as far as I could recollect, there had never been anything in the nature of a formal meeting. 'That's all right,' he replied, 'but I thought I had better let you know what I had heard.' I began then to realize the truth of Thakin Chit's remark that I would soon know all about spies laying traps. And I said thoughtlessly, 'I've been told that when the English bolted they left a lot of money with their spies. One of their jobs

is to make trouble between us and our friends the Japanese. So this talk about holding meetings must be some chance rumour that they reported so as to create dissension.' As soon as I had said this I realized that I had made a wrong move. He might easily have asked who gave me the information and told me to send the man along. That would have put me in a tight corner. Luckily, however, he did not ask me. All he said was, 'Well, if it is like that, you let me know when you come across one of these spies, and I'll chop his head off and stick it up in the centre of the town.' And, of course, I quite agreed.

Then Mo-gyo continued, 'Let us leave all that; it is of no great importance. I hear that Dr. Ba Maw has arrived in Mandalay. Do you think you could get hold of him for me?' I promised to do my best. Then, after thinking for a while, he said, 'Wait a bit! I've got something to do in Mandalay. You come along with me to Mandalay in about four or five days; then we can call on Dr. Ba Maw together.'

When we got back to Thakin Mya's house, I said to him, 'How about that, Thakin Mya? These spies don't take long to show their hand.' Thakin Mya, laughing, said, 'Hm! They are pretty sharp. So mum's the word. Least said, soonest mended. So I say nothing.'

'What's the good of that?' I asked. 'I could stand their reporting anything we said, but it's a bit thick to report us before we have said anything.'

'Patience and a thick skin is what you need.'

'All right,' I replied, 'let us leave it at that. But why did he ask me to get hold of Dr. Ba Maw?'

'Because he wants to see him, of course.'

'No, no, no! They have stuck up Thakin Tun Oke as a figurehead. If they want revenue or anything, doesn't he do the signing for them? So why should they want me to call in Dr. Ba Maw?'

'But, Thakin Nu, haven't you tumbled yet to Japanese

policy ? 'They train up pupils, but they remain the masters.'

About a week later we went with General Bo Let Ya to call on Dr. Ba Maw in Mandalay. On getting to his house we went upstairs and waited for about three minutes in the parlour, when Dr. Ba Maw came in and we got up to meet him. He told us to be seated, but, instead of sitting down himself, he went to the window and shouted out brusquely to some men who were pushing an old broken-down motor into the garden, 'Hey ! close the gate, and don't let any one into the house.' On looking round, I saw that in fact there was no gate. Perhaps during all the troubles someone had made off with it. Anyhow there was nothing to stop people from entering. And then, too, there was nothing secret about the visit of Bo Mo-gyo. He had merely come to pay a friendly call. So it seemed to me that there was no more sense in telling his men not to let any one into the house than in telling them to close the gate.

Bo Mo-gyo did his best to carry on a conversation. 'This war is for the welfare of the whole of South-east Asia.' 'All the peoples of South-east Asia ought to trust one another.' 'All the peoples of South-east Asia are brothers.' 'There is no doubt at all that Burma will certainly get its independence.' But all the while Ba Maw was puffing away at a cheroot, and looking here and there and seemed to be paying no attention. 'Yes, yes, quite so,' 'Go on, go on,' he said from time to time mechanically, but kept on calling to his servants to do this and that. This disconcerted Bo Mo-gyo and put him out of his stride. And when it happened a third time and then a fourth and a fifth time, I could see that he was badly annoyed. It seemed to me that, when he found he was making no impression, he cut short what he had meant to say. But I don't know why Dr. Ba Maw behaved like that.

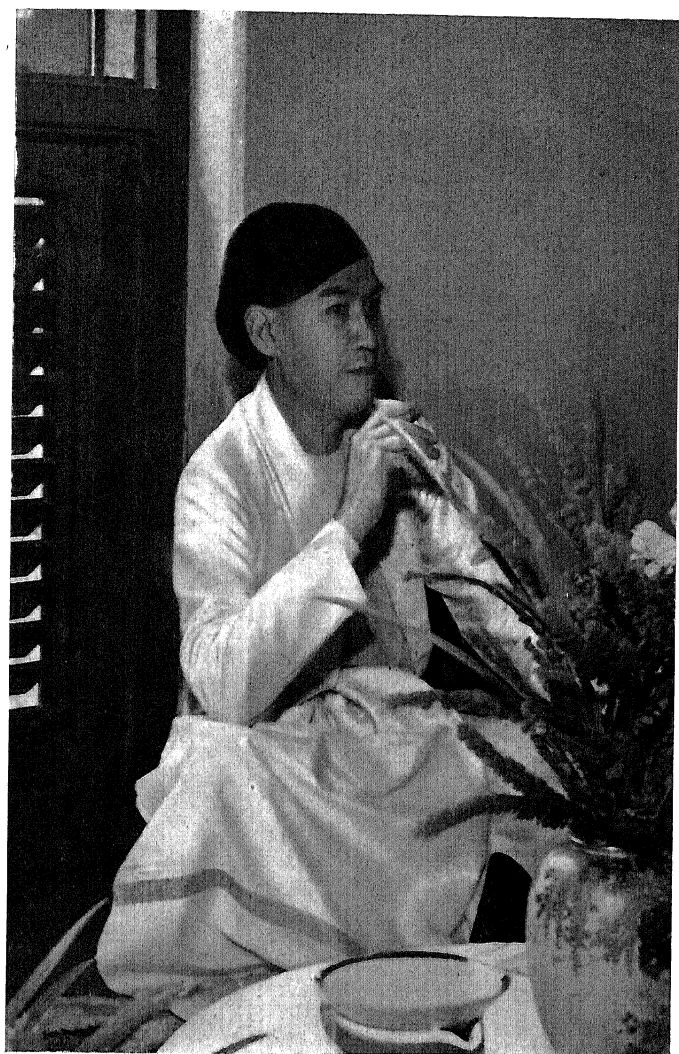
That reminds me of another similar incident. During the Japanese military administration, Raj Behari Bose, the Adviser to the Provisional Indian Government, came

to visit the Party Headquarters in Signal Pagoda Road. During his speech, Dr. Ba Maw picked up a newspaper and sat reading it. I nudged Thakin Than Tun who was sitting close by and drew his attention, 'Look, he's at it again!' Bose stopped speaking for about a couple of minutes. Then Dr. Ba Maw, as if he had only just noticed that Bose was speaking, turned round to him and said, 'Go on, go on!'

Similarly Bo Mo-gyo stopped when he found he was talking to no purpose, and we began chatting about things in general. Dr. Ba Maw mentioned to Bo Mo-gyo that some of his followers were being bullied by soldiers of the Burma Independence Army, and that he had just received a complaint against a certain captain Bo Ba Oke. The whole thing was very trifling. There was no occasion for anyone like Bo Mo-gyo, the Commander-in-Chief of the whole Burma Independence Army, to take any action. Any colonel or major, or even a captain or lieutenant could have dealt with it. But Bo Mo-gyo was itching for a chance to show off to Dr. Ba Maw what a big man he was. So he shouted angrily to General Bo Let Ya, 'You must go off at once today and arrest this Bo Ba Oke. Send him down to Rangoon and I'll try him myself.' It was just like Dr. Ba Maw shouting angrily to his men to close the gate that was not there.

About ten days after my return to Rangoon I received instructions from the Japanese Residency, formerly Government House, where the Japanese had established their headquarters, that I was to go next day to Maymyo, as Dr. Ba Maw wanted to see me. Thakin Mya, Thakin Tun Oke and several others were taken up to Mandalay by plane, but none of us knew why we were wanted. It was only next morning on meeting Dr. Ba Maw that I learned that we were to make arrangements for a so-called 'Preparatory Committee' to frame a constitution. This gave me rather a shock.





DR. BA MAW



Right from my earliest days in college I had been keen on writing and, above all, on writing plays. No matter whether they were good or bad, it was like a disease that I could not shake off. I thought so well of myself that in the competition for the Prince of Wales' Prize I submitted five plays and sent off English translations to England. Now when I read them again in cold blood I find them ridiculous. But at the time I simply had to write them and submit them and send them off to England. It was a mental and physical obsession and, if prevented from doing so, I would probably have been seriously ill. To make a clean breast of it I must admit that almost all the love letters that I wrote to my girl friend in college were written in the form of plays. So when I took my degree in 1929 it was my firm intention to become an English playwright.

But if you pull a twig the whole plant follows, as the saying goes. With my restless disposition I drifted this way and that and, little by little, without being a politician, I found myself entangled in the world of politics. When I arrived in Insein Jail in 1940 it was some ten or eleven years since I had resolved to be an author and, when I seriously thought over my past, I realized that I had made practically no progress towards achieving my ambition. I had nothing to show for all these years and grudged the time that I had wasted vainly. So for a second time I made a firm resolve that on leaving jail I would become a writer. When Thakin So gave me a pile of Marxist literature while we were in jail I just let it pile up. He reproached me because I would not read a line on politics, but would go on reading any kind of a play after dark by lamplight. But I just laughed at him and said that when he became the Lenin of Burma I would be its Maxim Gorki. And during my one and a half years in jail I wrote five plays and two novels.

Just after making this firm resolution for the second time it was rather hard on me to be dragged back again into

the political ring. And when I met Dr. Ba Maw again in the evening I told him that I wanted to have nothing to do with this Preparatory Committee.

‘Why not?’ he asked.

‘I’ve got something else to do.’

Then he lectured me, ‘Thakin Nu, you are always running off the track. Politics does not consist merely in pulling things down. It also means building them up. I shan’t be able to carry on for very much longer. And then there will only be Bo Aung San, Thakin Than Tun and you. Now that you have a chance, do try to learn the work, and let me give you a good practical training.’

I asked him just to train Bo Aung San and Thakin Than Tun, as really I had not the slightest interest in that kind of thing. ‘And what does interest you?’ he said. I began to explain that all I cared for was writing, when he broke into a loud fit of laughter.

‘I thought it might be something serious. But as for writing, all youngsters pass through that stage. I was mad about it myself when I was young. But it passes off.’

‘But can’t you manage to get along without me?’

‘I’ve already included you in the list.’

‘Well, how about this? Drop me out of it when you enlarge the committee into a government council.’

He agreed to this and next day we all went to the Japanese army headquarters in Maymyo. About five minutes before the time fixed for the meeting Colonel Hiraoka came into the room where we Burmans were sitting. He told us to go and take our seats in the large room; when the Commander-in-Chief entered we were all to rise! ‘When the Commander-in-Chief reaches his place I will call out *Ka-Re* and you must bow respectfully to him and he will bow in return. He will address you, and when he has finished you will all sit down.’

While the Commander-in-Chief was addressing us, U Ba Pe came in. He was not wearing any head-dress and

he had on a black cloth jacket and a faded old longyi, and he was carrying a police constable's hat in his hand. He stared dazedly at all the people round as if he were just recovering consciousness after a swoon. When we got back to the sitting-room he explained that he had not the slightest idea about what was happening. 'I was having my meal,' he said, 'when a Japanese policeman came and asked if I were U Ba Pe. I merely said "Yes," and he told me to come with him and dragged me along just as I was, without even giving me time to change. I have come like this the whole way from Shwebo.' We all burst out laughing.

'Wait a bit,' he said, 'what is all this supposed to be?'

Dr. Ba Maw explained that we were forming a Preparatory Committee, and U Ba Pe had been included as we wanted representatives of all parties and groups.

'Very well,' replied U Ba Pe, 'but what kind of a constitution are we to have?'

'The constitution has not yet been drafted,' said Dr. Ba Maw. 'They have not yet told us what we are to do.'

'Burma is dead!' exclaimed U Ba Pe, 'Burma is dead.'

'What do you mean, "Burma is dead,"' asked Dr. Ba Maw.

But U Ba Pe only turned round to me and repeated, 'Burma is dead.'

He kept on moaning, 'Burma is dead, Burma is dead.' He did not try to explain why it was dead or what had killed it. But I think he had in his mind's eye Japanese policemen tearing out finger-nails, pumping hot water into your belly and hanging you upside down.

While I was in Maymyo I was asked to help a man who had been arrested by the Japanese on suspicion of being concerned with Thakin So in inciting the Burma Independence Army to rise against them. When I went to explain the circumstances to Dr. Ba Maw a Japanese

army officer happened to be present. It was the man who had found Dr. Ba Maw when he was hiding in the jungle after his escape from Mogok Jail, and they were on very friendly terms. He listened to what I had to say and promised to look into the matter. About a couple of hours later he sent round a Japanese interpreter who could speak Burmese fluently. I was glad to think that I should get some news about my friend. But as soon as he saw me he asked, 'Didn't you go to Chungking?'

I went hot all over but answered very politely that I had been there.

'Why did you go?'

'To make friends.'

'Make friends! What do you mean by making friends?'

'So that we could be on friendly terms.'

He didn't seem to like that.

About ten days later, when I was in Rangoon I had occasion to go to the house of Bo Mo-gyo. He was upstairs and the sentry went to call his Japanese aide-de-camp, who asked me to write my name. As soon as he read it he exclaimed angrily, 'So you are Thakin Nu. That's bad. Why did you go to China to help our enemies?' 'Look here!' he said, pointing to his right eye, 'it was a Chinese gun that made me lose this eye. Now I have to wear a glass eye.' I tried to express my sympathy as I thought this might soothe him, and muttered, 'Dear, dear.' But it was like adding fuel to the fire. 'What do you mean with your "Dear, dear,"' he replied, 'you're a bad lot, going to help our enemies.' And he looked as if he was going to hit me.

I did not quite know what to do. But I happened to have in my pocket a photograph taken at the Conference which showed the Commander-in-Chief Iida with me and the other members. I took it out and handed it to him. 'Hey, you fellow, what do you take me for? Just look at this. Here is General Iida and here am I.' But

he was not a bit discomposed, and all he said was, 'What if it is General Iida? So long as we Japanese act straight we need not be afraid of anyone. You wait a bit. You'll soon find out what's what.' And he marched straight out of the room. I felt quite sure that he had gone off to call some friend of his among the military police to strip off my finger-nails. Fortunately, just then Bo Aung San and some officers came into the room, so I went along with them, and the aide-de-camp and his friend in the military police did not have the chance to get at my fingers.

As a matter of fact the Japanese had not spoken to me very roughly. But I felt uneasy because I had not acted like a man and taken him by the throat, asking how he dared speak to me like that. However, I cheated myself with comfortable thoughts. 'I could easily smash him. When I was at school I have knocked out far stronger men with a single blow. If I do go for him it will only lead to trouble.' And so on. Before I had quite got over my shame Dr. Ba Maw sent for me one evening to come along as quick as I could about some urgent business. He said that he had just been told by Dr. Suzuki that the military police were going to arrest me. I told him that I had already heard about it. 'But they have nothing much to go on. There is an album containing photographs of me with some members of the Chinese Government, taken while I was at Chungking. Now it has got into the hands of the military police. Colonel Nagata told me that they had consulted him as they did not like to risk arresting me while I was a member of the conference, and he had advised them not to do so. But these military police are a tough crowd, and they may not listen to what he says.'

'That is just what Dr. Suzuki told me,' replied Dr. Ba Maw. 'But I let him know straight away that if they arrested you, they would have to arrest me as well.'

'It looks as if the military police had sent Dr. Suzuki to find out how you felt about it.'

‘That’s very likely. Anyhow I spoke to him quite plainly.’

About three days before this I had got Dr. Ba Maw to give a protective pass to Didok U Ba Cho. As most people know, during the Japanese advance U Ba Cho had moved to Shwebo where he wrote articles against the Japanese which were dropped by planes within the Japanese occupied area. On leaving Shwebo, he had not dared to come straight to Rangoon, but had put up with his family in the house of Thakin Tin in Pegu. When the military police got on his tracks he had left his family and was practically hiding in the jungle until it occurred to him to get a pass from Dr. Ba Maw. After the meeting with Dr. Suzuki it became clear that matters were growing worse for those who had been in contact with the Chinese. The followers of Dr. Ba Maw urged him to get back the pass if it had not yet reached U Ba Cho, and he asked me to return it. Finally, however, he told me to warn U Ba Cho not to do anything without letting him know, and U Ba Cho got his pass.

Once again, about a week later, Dr. Ba Maw sent for me urgently. ‘Look here, Thakin Nu,’ he said, ‘something always keeps on cropping up about you. Have a look at this.’ And he passed over to me a note that the military police at Mandalay had sent him for enquiry. When I read it I found that it was a document written in red ink instigating a rebellion against the Japanese, and among the three or four signatures written at the foot my own was included. I was more amused than disturbed.

‘I’d rather not say anything. I never guessed until now that Burmans were such a feeble crowd. How could I possibly have printed this? And supposing I had printed it, would I have signed my own name to it? And if I had signed it, wouldn’t I have the sense to be hiding in the jungle? At a time like this no one but a madman would sign and publish such a thing and then remain in the open.



If we Burmans fall into the pit, it is because we have been pushed in by Burmans.' Dr. Ba Maw nodded assent and I went back home.

But it was like dodging a snake and treading on a scorpion. One trouble followed another. All round the countryside the military police were bullying the people and those who escaped their clutches came streaming into Rangoon. There was quite a crowd of refugees and their tales of the behaviour of the Japanese and their Burman tools, how they had been bullied and robbed and man-handled, almost frightened people to death. It was the Burman district officials who were responsible for about three-quarters of the arrests by the military police. When the British left Burma these officials were in the black books of the public, and men claiming to be members of the Burma Independence Army confiscated their guns and cars and insulted them. But when the Preparatory Committee had been formed practically all of them were reinstated. At the same time the Burma Independence Army was replaced by the Burma Defence Army, and the local units of the Independence Army were disbanded. This was a good opportunity for district officials who had suffered from them to get a bit of their own back, and take their turn at bullying. If they could not take action themselves, they passed word to the military police. There were almost innumerable reports of this kind of thing by letter, or by word of mouth, or by the victims themselves.

There is really nothing to wonder at in Burmans behaving in this manner. When people have long been enslaved very few can retain any self-respect or sense of personal shame. They place little value on the strength they might derive from social unity with their own folk, or of using this common social unity to promote the national welfare; they value more highly the strength they derive from making common cause with foreigners, and instead of using their position to help their people they use it to cut

their throats. Men who did not understand the situation naturally thought that we could set everything right with a mere stroke of the pen. And when I saw how little I could do I was so ashamed to meet them that I used to go up to my room in the office by the back stairs and come down again also by the back stairs.

The whole time since I took up politics I have never felt so miserable. Before then I might be thirsty but I was happy; I might be hungry but I was happy; in jail or out of jail, I was quite happy. But now it was a case of a golden palace and an empty belly, as the saying goes. I had a fine house to live in, a car to drive about in, but what with worry for myself and worry for my people I never had a moment's ease. One day Dr. Ba Maw had an idea that he wanted to talk over with me. He wanted me to talk to the East Asia Youth Conference. I asked what I was to talk about and he said 'Politics, of course,' and if I would undertake it he would jot down a few notes. I was to start off with world history showing that it was a series of five wars between the East and West. He had got all that written down. The fifth war had begun in 1905 with the Russo-Japanese War, of which the present war was merely a continuation. Japanese leadership was essential if we were to drive the westerners out of Asia, the main objective of the war. 'When this talk comes to the knowledge of the military police they will think better of you; as it is they have a grudge against you.' I agreed to do this, and Dr. Ba Maw called in a stenographer and dictated the history of the five world wars and afterwards gave me a copy of the leaflet in English.

Before long Ko Ba Gyan arranged for me to give a lecture to his Youth League. After I had finished talking I called for questions. In a meeting chock-full of Japanese spies an Arakanese lawyer blurted out, 'Will Japan give Burma independence?' I was pretty angry with him for asking a stupid question like that at such a

critical time. 'Of course they will,' I replied. Up he got again and said, 'I don't believe it.' There was a dead silence, as dead as a fire that has been extinguished with a bucket of water. I was angry with him at first, and then I admired his courage. But I was sorry for him, as I felt sure that sooner or later the military police would reward him with hot water, or pincers or something else unpleasant.

### CHAPTER III

## THE BA MAW GOVERNMENT

(1942, 1 August to 1943, April)

ABOUT two months after the formation of the Preparatory Committee we received permission to form a Burmese Government subordinate to the Japanese Command. As it was to take effect from 1 August we had to draw up a list of members before the end of July. In accordance with our former arrangement in Maymyo, Dr. Ba Maw agreed that I need not be included among the members. This seemed to arouse the suspicions of the Japanese spies, and at a dinner given by the Japanese Commander-in-Chief I was asked straight out by Colonel Nasu why I was reluctant to accept office; was it because I did not want to help the Japanese? But I had the happy idea of saying that my reason for refusing was my desire to take part directly in promoting good relations between the Burmese and the Japanese, and so for the time I managed to pass it off.

But some three days before the new Government was to be appointed Dr. Ba Maw sent for me very urgently to come to his house. At that time out of about one hundred and twenty appointments covering the whole of Burma there were only five or so from the thakins and the old Burma Independence Army, and they were all very angry with Dr. Ba Maw. Even Thakin Mya and Thakin Than Tun were seriously thinking of resigning their posts. It was only because the Inner Circle had decided they would be more useful inside the Government that they had consented to remain. If they had resigned on account of

their personal feelings and the slight put on them, the quarrel between the thakins and damas would have spread throughout the whole country. That would have been just what the Japanese wanted, as they were always doing their best to find a weak joint and split the parties.

When I saw Dr. Ba Maw he greeted me by saying, 'Look here, Thakin Nu, Thakin Chit and his men are really going too far. If it had not been out of consideration for you and Thakin Mya he would have got into serious trouble long ago.'

I asked what he had been hearing about them.

'When Thakin Kyaw Nyein entertained the thakins the other day they all took a solemn oath that on the occasion of forming the new Government on the 1st of August they would assassinate me and Dr. Ba Han.'

'Wait a bit. According to your informers, who were present at this party?'

Dr. Ba Maw thought for a short while and said, 'Thakin Chit, Thakin Lu E, the barrister Chan Htoon——'

'That's enough. I don't believe it.'

'Don't believe! You never believe anything I tell you,' said Dr. Ba Maw rather angrily.

'Aren't you always hearing something of the kind? If there were any truth in what you hear you would be dead long ago.'

'So one must die whenever there's a plot, and if one doesn't die there's no plot!'

'There is one thing about this that makes me certain it can't be true.'

'What's that?'

'Barrister U Chan Htoon and assassination are poles apart. It is quite impossible to believe that he is concerned in anything of the kind.'

'Oh, well,' said Dr. Ba Maw, 'I thought I had better let you know.'

'There's just one more thing,' I added. 'You say that

you are always getting information from these men about Thakin Chit. Can't they make any reports without bringing him in? Is he the only man in Burma that needs watching?'

On the morning of the 2nd of August Dr. Ba Maw sent for me again.

'I suppose it is about Thakin Chit again?' I said, 'and you have found out that I was right.'

'Just the contrary,' he replied, handing me a report from his informers. 'Just read this.'

The report dealt with a minor incident that had happened on the 1st of August. After the inaugural ceremony Dr. Ba Maw was due to make a public statement of his policy at the Football Ground, but the broadcasting apparatus was overheated and after getting up to speak he had to sit down again. Everyone had seen what had happened. But his pet informers took advantage of this little accident to send in a report that when Dr. Ba Maw sat down Thakin Lu E turned to Thakin Chit and said, 'For all this blighter's swank, he is bloody well let down this time.' And Thakin Chit replied, 'It didn't come off today. But they'll only last so long as their luck holds. There will be a good chance soon, you just wait and see.' And there was a lot more to the same effect.

When I read the note I could not help wondering at these super-special informers and the way their minds worked. For I happened to be sitting between them, with Thakin Chit on my right hand and Thakin Lu E on my left. Whatever either of them said, they would have had to say across me, and it was quite impossible that they could have said anything without my hearing it. I explained all this.

Dr. Ba Maw was astonished and said, 'You were with them!'

'I was with them,' I replied, 'but we all belong to the same set, so don't take just my word. In the row just

behind there were Mrs. Tun Win and also Daw Daw Yin from your own house. If Lu E had said this to Thakin Chit they must have overheard him. Just ask them. And if they say the story is true you can chop my head off.'

Dr. Ba Maw said again, 'So they really were with you!' 'Don't ask me. Ask the old ladies.'

Dr. Ba Maw, looking puzzled, said, 'Then what can these people be up to?'

'Anyone can see what they are up to,' I replied. 'They know they can earn a good living by telling lies. If the old ladies had not been sitting just behind us no one can say how far the fire might have spread.'

'What kind of a man is this Thakin Chit?'

'He's quite all right. He used to be a schoolmaster, and quite a lot of his pupils joined the Burma Independence Army. Wherever you went you heard him talked of as "the Master". So if anyone disappeared for some private reason of his own, people said, "That's Thakin Chit's doing". Or if anyone went melancholy mad and jumped into the water, it was all "Thakin Chit's doing". So for no reason at all he got a big name while he was just sitting at home and doing nothing.'

Dr. Ba Maw said that he would like to meet him.

'There you are! That is just why I have been pressing you to organize a Party. When men who should be working together remain strangers, busy-bodies can come in between them and make mischief. If there is a Party, you can meet all these people, and when people meet they get closer together. As you are always saying, if we have the people behind us the Japanese won't find it so easy to stir up trouble. And the best way to get a backing is to organize a Party.'

Dr. Ba Maw agreed. 'True enough, so let us get on with it. That is what I keep on saying. Get to work. And if you want any help, come to me.' When I met him next day he told me that he had got rid of the whole

gang, meaning the men who had been stuffing him with lies. Dr. Ba Maw, in fact, was usually ready to discuss politics quite freely with the younger men. He was in the habit of calling on Thakin Mya, Thakin Than Tun, and me and others of our group for suggestions as to what ought to be done. But very often people who did not like our plans managed to put a spoke in them and so many of them were spoiled. For example, after the Conference at Mandalay most of the people went back to Rangoon, but at his request I stayed behind in Maymyo. For about a week or ten days until I went down to Rangoon, Dr. Ba Maw spent the whole time explaining how he would build up Burma with the help of the younger generation and would teach us all that he had learned. 'Speaking as a practical statesman,' he would say, 'what the Japanese said about dying for the independence of Burma was just a trick; but if Burmans stick together they cannot cheat us. . . .' And so on, and so on — just like water streaming out of a jug.

We also were doing all we could for unity. Bo Aung San, Bo Ne Win and the other leaders of the army had left a note for Dr. Ba Maw in Maymyo to the effect that they knew the Japanese had cheated us, and the only hope for Burmans was to remain united. They urged him to station the whole Burmese army together in one place wherever he might think fit. And Than Tun had undertaken to support Dr. Ba Maw and had called a meeting of the thakin leaders in order to impress on them that unity was the great thing; if anyone were to endanger national unity they were to do all they could to suppress him. Dr. Ba Maw was quite convinced by their obvious zeal for unity, and greatly encouraged. Yet, as soon as the men who wanted to deceive him heard that he had come to Rangoon, they began to stir up trouble with all sorts of stories. 'The thakins are going to assassinate you'; 'Look out for Thakin Chit'; 'A thakin is looking for someone to



beat you up.' And they all joined in attacking us so as to kill the tender plant of unity. If bugs of that kind had not crept in to the cracks when the appointments were first made things would not have been so bad.

Not long after Dr. Ba Maw had got rid of his super-special informers we set about forming a Party. But there were two or three preliminary obstacles. One difficulty was about its name. The thakins wanted to call it the Do Bama Party. The damas did not want the name of Sinyetha-Wunthanu to disappear. After some little discussion both groups agreed to call it the Do Bama-Sinyetha Party.

The next thing was to frame by-laws. These were drafted by Thakin Than Tun, and adopted with a few amendments and additions. According to these rules Dr. Ba Maw became the *Ahnashin*, the Lord of Authority, the Dictator.

Another important business was the appointment of leaders and secretaries for the districts. For the most part damas were appointed as leaders and thakins as secretaries. The choice of men for some districts reminded me of the elections in the old days. The thakin and dama leaders in the dining-room of Dr. Ba Maw's residence were as keen on boosting the claims of their own men as the canvassers in the elections. In close contests, as was only natural, the boosters forgot themselves and lost their tempers. A thakin would say, 'I can't possibly agree to this man being appointed a leader. During all the trouble, he remained in hiding and now he turns up for the first time at this tea-party wearing a dama head-dress for the election.' And a dama would reply, 'Do you call that man a thakin? During the Burma Independence Army time all he did was to confiscate a gun and use it to attack damas.' And then suddenly they would recollect themselves and burst out laughing. And I thought to myself, 'So that is the way to become a public man', and noted it as Lesson No. 1 in the Politician's A B C.

Before we could finish the whole business there was one great matter still to settle — the question of a flag. The thakins voted for a tricolour with a peacock; the damas wanted yellow as one of the colours and insisted that a peacock was out of date. As they could not come to an agreement we had to keep on adjourning the meetings about the flag. Finally they settled on a flag with the lower two-thirds yellow and the top one-third green with a rising sun in red on the green background. The damas approved the flag because it was mostly yellow and the thakins could not object because it was a tricolour, yellow, green and red. As Burmans believe that there is the figure of a peacock in the sun the thakins who wanted a peacock were appeased, while the damas were satisfied because it was the sun and not a peacock. And as the Party practically consisted of thakins and damas there was no further trouble about the flag.

When they had agreed on the flag there was the question of the dedication ceremony. A special meeting was called to arrange about setting up the standard and finally the following procedure was devised. The standard was to be made of the best Mandalay silk and set up in the royal palace at Mandalay. At the same time some of the Soil of Victory was to be brought down from Shwebo and taken with the standard to the vacant plot at the entrance to the Royal Lakes that the Do Bama-Sinyetha alliance had named the Soil of Victory. The transport of the standard was no simple matter. From the time that the standard and the Soil of Victory started right down to Rangoon there was to be no halting anywhere. We had to arrange for men to hand them from one stage to the next the whole way down from Shwebo to Rangoon. They could make their own arrangements about music and dancing; the main point was that from Shwebo right down to the place appointed for the Soil of Victory in Rangoon there should not be a single halt. The Ahnashin

and his Council were to receive it at the Party headquarters in Signal Pagoda Road and then, after signing their names on the standard in blood drawn from their arms, they were to form a procession round the town and finally reach the plot of land appointed for the standard and the Soil of Victory.

The intention was that the central standard should be the parent of similar flags for local councils throughout the country. For example, when a flag had been prepared for Myaungmya District it was to be hoisted under the national standard so as to be impregnated with its virtue and would thus become the flag of the district council. There would be no need for the flags of townships and villages to be brought into Rangoon as they could be impregnated with virtue from the district flag. The virtue with which one flag had been impregnated could be passed on to another flag and so downwards in succession. Until a flag had been so impregnated it was just a piece of cloth and could not be used as the standard of a council.

All this was a very fine plan. But the Ahnashin, the 'Lord of Authority', had only his personal authority. If he wanted to do anything he had to obtain permission from the Japanese Commander, the Lord of Force. And when the Lord of Authority asked permission for the ceremony from the Lord of Force, it was refused. The Ahnashin earnestly protested, 'But we have made practically all the arrangements.' But the Lord of Force sent back a blunt reply, 'I don't care what you have arranged. Those are the orders of the Army.' And the Ahnashin could only reply, 'Very well, you people have the weapons so you can talk like that.' That was the only answer that he could make.

But the Ahnashin was not the kind of man to give in so easily. On the day appointed for the dedication of the standard he called all the district leaders and secretaries to headquarters for a ceremonial distribution of rewards

and titles. And in his speech he drew attention to the need for unity. 'It is not at all strange,' he continued, 'if the Japanese display their authority here, there and everywhere. If we do not like it, and if we want to display our own authority, we ourselves must be strong. We can do nothing unless we are strong; if we are as strong as them we can display our strength. If we want to display our strength like they do, we must be as strong as they are. There is nothing very unusual about dying. You all know that none of our lives is safe; we all carry our life in our hand.' And he went on like this, his whole body shaking with anger. Than Tun, who was sitting close by, turned to me, saying, 'The Boss is pitching it rather strong today.' And I replied, 'He must be thinking all the time of that wiggling he got the other day from the army.'

As soon as the United Party had been formed the Japanese military police began to set traps. And mischief-makers, taking advantage of the opportunity, began to stir up trouble in all sorts of ways, verbally or by short notes or long reports. This was the kind of thing that went on:

'This word *sinyetha* in the name of the Party, what does it mean? Is a *sinyetha* the same thing as a communist?'

'What is the object of this Party?'

'Why are not you a member of the Government, Thakin Nu?'

'Is it true that the thakins in the Party are dissatisfied with Dr. Ba Maw?'

'In how many districts are there branches of the Party?'

'What is the total membership of the Party?'

'Is it true that the Government takes note of people who do not join the Party?'

Questions of that kind were continually being asked by Japanese editors belonging to the Kempetai and by the special newspaper reporters appointed by the military command. Practically every day and at least every three or four days they came to question me or the officials,

clerks and other employees working in the office. The questions might appear quite simple. But they were not so simple as all that. For example, someone might come along to ask why I had not joined the Government, and I would reply that I preferred to work directly for good relations between Japanese and Burmans. But don't go thinking that such an answer settled the whole business. People looking at the inscrutable faces of the Japanese would think that they had managed to hoodwink them, and say, 'They swallowed all I told them.' But the Kempetai would carefully record all your answers. Then before long some Japanese reporter would turn up and explain that he wanted to give a full account of the Party in the Japanese papers. He also would ask a lot of questions. The newspaper people were cuter than the Kempetai and could get more out of what you might say. One had to be pretty careful not to make any mistakes. But were you done with the business when you had given him the information that he wanted? Not by any means.

Suppose you exchange cigarettes or a few sweetmeats with a Japanese. He may come along by himself and say there are a few things that he does not understand very clearly. Or he may bring a friend and introduce him. One of them may remark that the Kempetai, or the Japanese soldiers or traders, are a bad lot. You may be inclined to think that this Japanese is rather a decent sort. But don't go blurting out anything that you really think. For when you have met these men you have not done with them. Suppose that the Japanese suspect you as a communist. Some Japanese who say they are communists will call on you. And they will fish for what they can find out. Someone will say that his younger brother has been arrested as a communist. And they will tell you how badly the Japanese treat the communists, giving them no more than a handful of rice and a cup of water a day, and how the Government oppresses them. Or one of them will say

that communist ideas are very sound and that communism works to help the poor; that even the Japanese Government has taken over many ideas from communism. So they tempt you with leading questions like digging a canal for water to run along.

And when you are looking at their stolid round faces, my friend, don't go thinking you are clever enough to deceive them. 'Least said, soonest mended.' There is always a chance of making a slip, and, even if what you have actually said may be all right, you may get into trouble because of some mistake by the interpreter, and everything that you say to the interpreter or the reporter or to that friend of yours or to the communists is reported to the police station. And any scrap of conversation with a Japanese spy who scrapes up acquaintance with you in the street or in the club or theatre or market or opium den is reported to the police station. And the officer in charge compares it with all the other reports to check what you have said.

But they only take all these precautions, my friend, if you are an official of some standing. They don't take so much trouble to make up their mind about an ordinary man. A cup of boiling water, stripping the nails off three or four fingers, or a couple of turns with the machine round your testicles, and you will be ready to admit anything, true or false, in accordance with what they think.

So when the Japanese began to get busy about the affairs of the Party I called in Hla Maung and Thakin Chit to discuss matters. Hla Maung had been President of the Students' Union in the year that the English left Burma. He was the kind of man who could see a yard if you showed him an inch. He knew a few Japanese phrases that always struck home with them, and when they were too inquisitive he would bring in these phrases just at the proper moment. He could get into the mind of the

Japanese much better than I could, so I always sent him when there was anything of importance to discuss.

While we were earnestly considering how we could best protect ourselves and the orderlies from Japanese intrigues we received news one day that the Kempetai had arrested the thakin leaders in Toungoo. This startled me so that I felt as dizzy as if I had been bashed over the head with a thick stick. What chiefly terrified me was the story of the messenger that the Kempetai had resolved to kill them all. According to him a Kempetai captain had met one of the leaders in the main street and had immediately drawn his revolver and shot him dead. So I sent Hla Maung to Colonel Hiraoka and I myself ran straight off to Colonel Nasu, the Chief of Staff, at the Residency. Here I came across General Aung San, who advised me first of all to get them to send a wireless message to Toungoo to postpone the execution. Colonel Nasu behaved very kindly. He immediately sent one of his aides to the Kempetai Commander, Major-General Matsuoka, to stop it, and said that I had better see him myself and explain matters. He fixed up an appointment for me, and the Major-General, when I saw him next day, told me that he had already sent a wireless message and was enquiring into the matter himself, and he promised to let me know any further development.

It seems that Colonel Nasu was afraid that if I ran straight into these scoundrels of the Kempetai there might be an explosion, and had therefore taken the precaution of first explaining to the Commander how mischievous they were. And I found that Colonel Hiraoka also had advised both Colonel Nasu and Major-General Matsuoka that the matter was really important. And to avoid any misunderstanding when I met the Kempetai Commander he also sent a trustworthy Japanese interpreter. After I had seen the Kempetai Commander, Colonel Nasu called me to the Residency and said I had better go to Toungoo myself and

clear things up with the military police there. As the executions had been postponed by wireless I felt a little less anxious. I finished off a few urgent matters in Rangoon and then a day or two later went to Toungoo along with an official from the Japanese War Office.

Everyone knew Bo Saing-gyo, the Head of the Kem-petai in Toungoo. The Japanese who came along with me described him. 'Thakin Nu,' he said, 'this fellow is more like an ogre than a man. From his looks I would not be surprised at his killing anyone off-hand without any question.' And when I saw him I quite agreed. Even when he was doing nothing he looked angry. Once he suspected a man of theft. He had him strung up to a beam with his hands tied behind him and broke his collar-bone. Next day the real thief was caught, and all he said to the man with the broken collar-bone was 'Get out.' Another time, when sitting in the office with nothing to do and looking out into the street, he noticed a man go past. He called him in, arrested him and knocked him down so violently that he lay on the ground unconscious. To Saing-gyo that seemed just friendly fun. You can imagine how a man shivered all down his back if he were so unfortunate as to fall into the hands of such a man.

However, thanks to the courage of Thakin Than Pe, the men who had been arrested managed to escape with their lives. Saing-gyo told Than Pe to sign a document written in Japanese. Than Pe stoutly refused to sign a document that he was unable to read. His wrists were bound and he was beaten on both sides with an iron rod until he lost consciousness. He still refused, and Saing-gyo gave him another dose of the same medicine. Another day when he was sitting down Saing-gyo kicked him on the forehead with his heavy boot; Than Pe's head struck against the wall and he fainted. Another day he blindfolded Than Pe and had him taken to the burial-ground. But it seems that while he was persecuting him like this the wireless message



came from Rangoon, and Saing-gyo with much regret had to give up the idea of executing him. Presumably the document that Than Pe was told to sign was a confession, and they all thought that if Than Pe had signed it they would have been done for. But by the time that I arrived in Toungoo they had been released, and you might have thought that Saing-gyo's face had been smeared with honey. They are wily people, these Japs.

Out of this affair of Than Pe at Toungoo I and Major-General Matsuoka, the Head of the Military Police, became quite good friends. He appeared to be a straightforward kind of man who would detect any crooked business, and would do what he thought right without fear or favour. From his face one might think that he had just been suddenly aroused out of a deep sleep. One day, when we were discussing Than Pe's case quite freely, the talk turned on the way in which the trickery of some mischief-makers led the military police to keep on arresting and ill-treating the thakins. He thought that it was because his men were raw, inexperienced hands and took cognizance of any report that they received, and suggested that in order to prevent injustice it might be well to attach some trustworthy thakins to the court police officers or something of that kind. So Thakin San We was attached to the Military Police headquarters. Afterwards Matsuoka gave him a written order to appoint men to the district police stations to help them to get at the truth about complaints. And Thakin San We himself went round as many districts as possible.

Thakin Chit, Thakin San We and Hla Maung were all very hard workers. They did not trouble me with every matter that came up to them and I had to deal only with those cases which they could not handle. Among these the case of Bo Ba Tin of the Burma Independence Army was exceptionally interesting. At that time the chief target of the Japanese military police in the Burman army

was Bo Let Ya. They always suspected his hand in any plot against the Japanese. It happened that the military telegraph wires in the neighbourhood of Mandalay were continually being cut. This really had nothing to do with any ill-feeling against the Japanese. Children found the wire very attractive and could not see it without wanting to cut off a bit. And, after the Japanese fashion, a lot of it had been left lying about on the ground. Even the highest wire was well within reach of one's arm. So children or carters, or fuel-cutters on their way back from the jungle, could take a piece home as an ornament. In some houses, I heard, they were using it as string.

But whenever the military police found that the wire had been cut they suspected Bo Let Ya's men. And they would arrest someone in the neighbourhood and say, 'It was Bo Let Ya who told you to cut the wire, wasn't it? Now tell the truth.' And they would bully him until he said what they wanted, and then the bullying stopped. One of the men arrested on this account was a civil judge. When they bullied him the unfortunate man could not think what to say and agreed that Bo Let Ya had told him to cut it. But, as Bo Let Ya was the second in command of the Burmese army, the military police did not dare to arrest him straight away, so they charged his aide-de-camp Bo Ba Tin by way of making an example.

Informers took advantage of this, and the Japanese military police thought they had discovered the seeds of a great plot against the Japanese. So they sent the case up to headquarters in Rangoon for further investigation. But on the way the civil judge jumped down from the train and got away.

It was at this stage that the matter came to my notice. I did not dare to tackle General Matsuoka about it too bluntly. So I began by calling on him three or four times and explained that in itself the cutting of the telephone wire was quite unimportant, that it had nothing to do

with disaffection towards the Japanese, as they supposed, but had been made use of by busy-bodies to stir up trouble. When it seemed to me that he was softening I ran off to Thakin Mya and Thakin Than Tun to tell them that it was pretty well all right and if they would come along and back me up we could finish the whole business. It made a great impression on the old man that two Ministers like Thakin Mya and Thakin Than Tun should pay him a friendly visit in this way. Hla Maung had given us the tip that the Japanese liked people to keep in touch with them and call on them, and we certainly found it very useful. Finding the old man so well inclined, Thakin Mya and Thakin Than Tun seized the opportunity to suggest incidentally that Bo Ba Tin should be released, and he undertook to do so. He kept his promise and shortly afterwards Bo Ba Tin was set free.

There was so much of this kind of work that Thakin Chit, Thakin San We and Hla Maung could hardly cope with it. Hla Maung was a late riser and was often rather fed up because people came along with their cases so early in the morning and disturbed his rest. All these poor lads were very helpful. They only put up to me cases that they could not settle themselves; in matters that they could settle themselves they did all they could, wet or fine, day or night, to help people who were in trouble. Colonel Hiraoka himself was a very good sort. We always ran off to him whenever there was any little trouble between the Burmans and the Japanese. Never once did he turn us down. He was not the kind of man to stick in his seat. He took up his attaché case and went straight off to the department concerned. There was never any delay or postponement. I could always rely on him if the Japanese were insolent, and he detested the bullying by the military police as much as I did.

## CHAPTER IV

### PREPARATIONS FOR INDEPENDENCE

(1943, May to July)

BURMA was to become independent. A committee was to draw up a Constitution for Independent Burma. Many Burmans and Japanese were all agog with excitement : the Burmans because they wanted to become members of the committee, and the Japanese because they wanted to use the committee to break the power of Dr. Ba Maw. Some of the nominees were as far as possible pro-Japanese. The leader of the Japanese in this matter was the famous Oseka who was the head of the Home Office during the Japanese Military Administration. His chief task was to find puppets who would do what the Japanese command wanted.

One evening a certain Professor Iwama came to my house. He was the Japanese Adviser in the Education Department. I had got to know him pretty well by going with him to Mandalay.

'I've got something important to talk about,' he said, and asked if we could be overheard. I assured him that it was quite safe, but he peered all around and asked me to come outside as he did not want to talk about it indoors. He was the kind of man who liked to be mysterious and make a great fuss about everything, however insignificant. But to please him I went along with him to Inya Lake. When we came to a lonely place he again looked carefully all round him. Then he said that Dr. Ba Maw was always grumbling about the Japanese, and in his heart was disaffected towards them. When he had been asked to

introduce Japanese as a compulsory subject in the schools he had not approved and insisted on their teaching English.

'There you are,' he went on, 'doesn't that show that he is hostile? And look here! You've been in his dining-room, haven't you? He has got a certificate from the King of England hung up on the wall.'

As a matter of fact it was not a certificate from the King of England. When Dr. Ba Maw went to England for the King's coronation he was asked to a luncheon given by the Lord Mayor of London. Dr. Ba Maw had had the invitation framed and hung up on his wall. Already one or two Japanese had drawn my attention to it, but when I told Dr. Ba Maw he said it didn't matter and left the card just as before.

'You people really are very difficult,' I replied. 'If anyone does not do exactly what you want you set him down as an enemy. And as for his objection to the teaching of Japanese, how would you like it if Burmese was made a compulsory subject in your universities?'

'Whatever you may say, my man, the whole army has set him down in the list of people disaffected towards the Japanese.'

'Well, that is just as they please.'

'Now, Thakin Nu,' he said, 'if you got the kind of chance that only comes once in a lifetime to a politician, would you take it?'

I tried to dodge the question by asking him, 'Why not?'

He clasped me by the hand and said, 'Good, then we're friends.'

'Yes, but tell me what this great chance is.' Iwama would not tell me then, but asked me to come to lunch at Oseka's house next day, and I agreed.

Iwama went off thinking that he had gained his point. Men who would greedily snap up whatever the Japanese offered were so blinded with their greed that they readily fell into all the many dangerous traps that the Japanese

set for them. The trap set by Iwama is a good illustration of the traps that the Japanese set for their tools. 'The Japanese army has entered Dr. Ba Maw in its list of enemies.' 'Will you take a chance such as comes only once in a lifetime to a politician?' Everyone knows that the three-card-trick men are swindlers. That is quite understood when they deal the cards. But men who cannot restrain their greed take fire and join the game until they are stripped even of the longyi round their waist. It was just like that with the Japanese. Everyone said they were cheats. And they did their cheating quite openly. It was just through greed that men let themselves be cheated.

On the same evening I went to see Dr. Ba Maw and told him all that had happened, and suggested that it might be as well for him to take down that invitation card and throw it away.

'That doesn't matter,' he said, 'don't worry about that.'

'No, no!' I replied. 'The men who are attacking you seize on every little thing, and when they piece all these little things together it becomes a big thing.'

(And not long afterwards I noticed that the 'certificate' had been replaced by a photograph of little fish playing in the water.)

'Anyhow,' he went on, 'tomorrow you had better try and pick up all you can get out of these men. But don't go beyond anything that I have said. You are apt to talk a little recklessly.'

So next day I went to Oseka's house where I found him surrounded with all his staff; I should think that along with him were about half a dozen Japanese officials. I expect that some of them were to watch my expression and some of them to fill in the details that Oseka wanted. They placed me on a big sofa at the end of the room and the others sat on either side and for a short time there was general conversation. Then Oseka began.

'Not long ago I was looking at some reports from the districts up-country. Well, now, on reading them I found they said that all over the country Thakin Nu was much more highly respected than Dr. Ba Maw. One thing particularly struck me. They said that even in the neighbourhood of Mandalay, where Dr. Ba Maw is supposed to be so strong, the supporters of Thakin Nu were more numerous. Now why . . .'

To look at Oseka one might think that he had only just risen from a sick-bed. His eyes were half closed and he spoke rather slowly in a low tone of voice. But don't be taken in by that. 'Now why . . .' was not just a stock phrase, like the questions in the correspondence columns of the *Deedok Journal*. And I thought to myself, 'Now you are trying to diddle me'. The day before, his man Iwama had told me about Dr. Ba Maw being in the black books of the army and had asked if I would dare to take advantage of a good opportunity. To talk in the language of draughts he had given away two pieces, and now Oseka was offering me a third. When I have watched men playing draughts, I have sometimes seen a player sacrifice as many as three pieces one after another, and have wondered why he allowed so many to be taken. As a result, however, he gets his three men back and crowns a king. That was the kind of trap that Oseka was laying for me.

'Now why is that?' asked Oseka, and I replied that in my opinion the reports were quite untrue. And glancing at his face I noticed that he seemed very disappointed. I noted also that, although he was a graduate of an American university, he did not speak English but used an interpreter, and it occurred to me that he wanted time while the interpreter was talking to make up his mind what line to take.

'The fact is,' I said, 'the men who make the enquiries don't consult everyone. The people who could give sound information as to the state of affairs keep out of the way of

your military police as they do not want to meet them. So the people that your military police come across talk just at random according to their likes and dislikes.'

'There may be something in that,' he replied, 'but the reports include a lot of enquiries from trustworthy people.'

'Well, I don't know how far your trustworthy people can be trusted. But I can tell you this. I refuse to believe that people in Mandalay and the neighbourhood think more highly of me than of Dr. Ba Maw. Don't talk about the Mandalay people having a good opinion of me. Why, they have hardly heard my name!'

'I don't know how that may be,' said Oseka, 'I am merely going by the reports that I get from the districts.'

Oseka seemed to have placed great confidence in his trap. And he might well do so. For so many people had fallen into traps of this kind that he reckoned quite confidently on succeeding as easily with me. When I did not tumble into it, he did not quite know what to do, and became rather silent. Then a Japanese officer whose name I do not know asked whether our thakins were on good terms with the men who had joined Dr. Ba Maw's Party.

'Of course they are,' I answered.

'They really are on good terms?'

'Really and truly.'

'If you are all on such good terms, can you show anything to prove it?'

'Certainly,' I replied. 'Look at our joint Do Bama-Sinyetha Association. Isn't that good enough proof that the thakins and damas are on good terms.'

The officer spoke a few words to Oseka with a supercilious expression and Oseka replied to him briefly with a smile. The officer, turning to me, again asked if this joint association was not merely a signboard while the thakins and damas were each gathering their own separate forces. I admitted that might be true to some extent of the underlings but the leaders were all on quite good terms.



'It is all very well for you to say that the leaders are on good terms,' he answered with a sneer, 'but do you yourself approve of everything that Dr. Ba Maw does?'

By this time I was getting fed up with his sneering countenance and said, 'You've got no right to ask that kind of thing. Dr. Ba Maw is our Ahnashin, and Ahnashin means our Leader. What would you say if I asked whether you approve everything done by your Commander-in-Chief, Kawabi?' Here Oseka broke in with a few words to the officer that I could not follow, and when the officer spoke again he had dropped the sneering look.

'Dr. Ba Maw gives all the appointments to his own men. Don't you know that all the younger thakins are grumbling because they don't get any of the jobs?'

I told him that this was no business of his, and about a quarter of an hour later I got up and left. In the evening I discussed the whole conversation with Dr. Ba Maw.

A day or two later Professor Iwama called on me and I could see from his face that he was rather angry about something. He said that they were all very disappointed with me the other day.

'And I was very disappointed with your lot,' I replied. 'What about that Japanese officer sneering and jeering and behaving so rudely?'

'Thakin Nu,' he said, 'you have missed a great chance. If it had been me I would have thrown over Dr. Ba Maw and stepped up into his place.'

'Professor Iwama, please listen to me. In the first place I have pledged my loyalty. In the second I don't want Dr. Ba Maw's kind of job. He has openly told me that he wants to resign. Moreover, he has given me free leave to tell that to any responsible officer of the Japanese army. And I have, in fact, mentioned it to Colonel Hiraoka. I told him because I thought he would pass it on to the army. And Dr. Ba Maw himself has said just the same

thing to Isamura,<sup>1</sup> as you will find out if you ask him. There! Have you got all that quite clearly? Have you still got any doubt about my wishes? For I certainly can't make them any clearer.'

Not long after this conversation with Professor Iwama we started to make preparations for the Independence Committee and I was dragged into it willy-nilly. I was very reluctant because framing rules and so on makes my head ache; it does not interest me and I don't understand it. About two days before the list was to be published Dr. Ba Maw showed it to me. When I saw that my name was included I asked him to let me off as it was the kind of thing that I did not understand. But he pointed out its importance and pressed me to join, and finally I agreed. In this committee there were some men who favoured an hereditary monarchy. Others held that the country would be ruined if it were governed by one man or one group. There were some men who would give the Japanese anything they wanted, and there were some men who would always take the Burman side in any dispute with the Japanese. Some were so muddled that, as the saying goes, they would not know whether they were going north or south, and would comply with any suggestion from Dr. Ba Maw without any thought about the direction in which he was taking them. And some were afraid that if they did not support Dr. Ba Maw he would become merely a puppet in the hands of the Japanese. So, with men who would object to everything and others who would agree to anything, the committee included men of all kinds. But four of us, Kodaw Hmaing, Thakin Mya, Thakin Than Tun and I, held the scales, and the side to which we four

<sup>1</sup> One day not long after Dr. Ba Maw's return from his first visit to Japan he and Thakin Mya met Major-General Isamura who was then third in command on the Japanese staff and in charge of Burma-Japanese relations. When Dr. Ba Maw had told him that he wished to resign, Isamura thumped on the table and stormed at him and threatened him. All this was known to Thakin Mya, and Dr. Ba Maw had pressed him not to let anyone know that he had been scolded like that.

gave our votes could win. Then why not use our strong position to smash Dr. Ba Maw who had been giving all the jobs to his own men and not to the thakins? That would have been a bad mistake, for then we would all have fallen into the Japanese trap. Let me try to make that rather clearer.

The Japanese wanted Dr. Ba Maw as their puppet. But as Ahnashin of the whole Party he held the strings in his own hands and would not allow the Japanese to pull them; he was firmly intent on holding the centre of the stage. So he was at odds with the Japanese army that wanted to pull the strings. Ordinarily the Japanese army could have got rid of him by a single blow. But from Dr. Ba Maw's first arrival in Japan he made a lot of friends, and the army could not get rid of him as easily as they had got rid of unsatisfactory leaders in China and Manchuria and elsewhere. So that in Burma the Japanese army could do no more than clip his wings by undermining him while strengthening his opponents. In this way they reckoned that either he would have to lean on them or, if he continued obstinate, would be powerless to do anything. So if we allowed ourselves to be annoyed by trifles, we should gain nothing by working against Dr. Ba Maw. As he had said to us in the first meeting of the committee, 'Chip off eight annas from the rupee, and it is not you who will get the eight annas that is left; it will go to the Japanese.' If we men who held the scales should attack him because of private grudges, we would gain nothing by it; all the profit would go to our good friends the Japanese. Thakin Mya, Thakin Than Tun and I were well aware of this.

But some people suspected that we supported Ba Maw because we were keen on holding office. Not to mention others, our chief counsellor, Kodaw Hmaing himself, made the same mistake. 'You won't starve if you don't get office,' he said. He reproached Thakin Mya so keenly as to move him to tears. But it was only because our critics

did not appreciate the facts of the situation that they were apprehensive. In view of the backing behind Thakin Mya and Thakin Than Tun there was no need for us to woo Dr. Ba Maw in order to get office; it was Dr. Ba Maw who had to woo us. He even had to conciliate men with much less backing. Indeed it would have been very difficult for Dr. Ba Maw to form a government without the support of Thakin Mya and Thakin Than Tun. Thakin Mya chiefly wanted to lead a quiet life and had not the slightest wish to take part in such a tangled drama. And Thakin Than Tun only accepted office because he thought that this would be the best cover for him to play his part in the resistance movement. So there was not the least truth in the charge that we supported Dr. Ba Maw because we wanted to hold office.

A little while before the Independence Committee was to meet, Dr. Ba Maw told me to get up as soon as the meeting began and say that I wanted to know from the Japanese army whether there was to be freedom of speech in the Assembly and whether members would get into trouble afterwards for anything that they might say. He would take up the question and obtain assurances from the Japanese. There would be many things said in the Assembly that the Japanese would not like so it would be better for them to know about it. U Thein Maung, M.A., had already been pressing me to put some questions of this kind. So when I rose to put the questions, Dr. Ba Maw, as arranged, produced the permit from the Japanese.

The way that U Thein Maung behaved in our discussions was very encouraging; he was so bold in protesting vigorously against the Japanese attempts to encroach on the internal affairs of a so-called independent country that people who heard him were quite startled. As I have already mentioned some people firmly believed that it would be a terrible blunder to entrust all the affairs of country to one man or one party, and among these was

U Thein Maung. When motions were proposed by Dr. Ba Maw and our group he argued with all his force, and said all there was to say, though he knew very well that against all the combined forces the opposition vote could not prevail. But he stuck to his point whatever the result might be, and in some matters we gave way on account of his perseverance. He often said that he was like a man rescuing his goods from a sinking ship; if he could save only a single pillow he was one pillow to the good and did not lose everything.

One day, less than a week after the committee had been sitting, the Commander-in-Chief, General Kawabi, sent a message for all the members to attend in his house. After we had all gathered in the reception hall a Japanese official entered to say that General Kawabi was just coming, and we all stood up. General Kawabi walked in with a haughty demeanour and a face adorned by a stiffly waxed moustache rather like a rat's tail. He remained standing by the seat of honour while a Japanese officer led us up in turn to shake hands with him. As soon as we sat down again he rated us for about half an hour like a schoolmaster rebuking his pupils. The substance of what he said was, 'You people talk a lot of nonsense. We soldiers don't like too many words. In future I want more work and less talk. Now you can go.' We were all left staring with great round eyes like an owl in the twilight, and, when he told us to go, we went off without having had a chance to say anything.

It was Major-General Isamura who arranged for us to be summoned like this and rebuked and dismissed. This Isamura was a man with a very good opinion of himself and a very poor opinion of Burmans; he seemed to think we were no better than Coringhi coolies. Day in, day out, his chief object was to humiliate Dr. Ba Maw and Dr. Ba Maw's Government. In this connection I must give another instance of his rude behaviour. While we were

holding our meeting of the committee to prepare for independence the Japanese Premier Tojo invited Dr. Ba Maw to meet him in Singapore to discuss the transfer of two Shan States to Siam. So we had to adjourn our meeting and arrange to go to Singapore. In fact, he really did not want to consult Dr. Ba Maw but merely to give him instructions. Dr. Ba Maw asked me to accompany him. In the evening before we were to leave, Isamura telephoned to Dr. Ba Maw that we were to wait outside the gate punctually at six o'clock next morning to go with him and report to the Commander-in-Chief. Dr. Ba Maw and I arrived punctually at six o'clock. Six-fifteen, no sign of Isamura's car. Six-thirty, no car. Then at six-forty-five Isamura arrived and drove straight on without stopping, merely calling out 'Sorry' from his car. He thought it quite unnecessary to apologize for keeping the Prime Minister, Dr. Ba Maw, waiting in the road for three-quarters of an hour.

At that time we were still under the Military Administration. Dr. Ba Maw was subordinate to the Commander-in-Chief, and had to report to him all his goings and comings whenever he left or returned to Rangoon. But we might just as well have waited inside the house. Or if Isamura had been decently polite he could have met us in Dr. Ba Maw's house, which was only some three minutes' drive to that of the Commander-in-Chief and we could all have gone together. It was just because he wanted to humiliate Dr. Ba Maw as much as possible that he made him wait in the road for three-quarters of an hour.

When we got to Singapore an officer came to the airport to greet us and take Dr. Ba Maw by car to the house where he was to put up. The pilot car was in front; next came Dr. Ba Maw. I was in the next car and Isamura in the last. When he saw this arrangement he looked very disgusted. After about five miles Isamura pressed on ahead and told Dr. Ba Maw's car to stop as there was

something of his in it that he wanted. After hunting around for about five minutes he gave up looking for what had never been there and, without saying anything, set off again with his car at the head of the procession. So when we finally arrived Isamura was in the first car, Dr. Ba Maw in the second and I was in the third.

Similarly, when General Tojo came to Singapore, Mr. Bose and Dr. Ba Maw went to welcome him at the airport. After General Tojo had left we all got into our cars to follow him. Dr. Ba Maw was kept waiting in his car for about five minutes because Isamura, who was to go in the car ahead of him, just stood idly beside his car smoking one cigarette after another. And as the car in front did not start, Dr. Ba Maw's car could not start. Bose was standing close by waiting for his own car, and it looked as if Isamura was just showing off for his benefit, as much as to say, 'See what a great man I am; this fellow Dr. Ba Maw cannot get away until I leave.' Dr. Ba Maw used to try to hit back at him, but as he was just like water in Isamura's hand he could not hit back very hard. For example, while they were staying in Singapore Isamura sent a military policeman to call Dr. Ba Maw to breakfast, and Dr. Ba Maw shouted at the man that he would not come to breakfast and his food was to be brought up to his room. If he could not get out of it and had to take lunch or dinner with Isamura, Dr. Ba Maw would gobble up his food without speaking a word and go off as soon as he had finished.

So it was in order to humiliate the members of the committee that Isamura had arranged this meeting with the Commander-in-Chief. Their feelings were badly hurt and when the committee met next day there was much grumbling. 'We are not little children,' they said, 'and object very strongly to the manner in which this Commander-in-Chief fellow addressed us yesterday.' U Thein Maung tabled a remonstrance expressing the displeasure

of the members. The Burman stenographers used to take down all that was said and it was translated into English and sent to the army, so it is quite certain that the Commander-in-Chief must have seen U Thein Maung's remonstrance.

Every day in the discussions among the members there were references to our distrust of the Japanese. One day in a communication from the army there was a passage exhorting us to trust the Japanese. So in our reply we included a paragraph to say that we were quite willing to trust the Japanese, but wanted the Japanese to trust Burmans. Isamura was cunning enough to get this passage omitted from the report. But Dr. Ba Maw was not the kind of man to give in easily, and when he had to speak at a dinner given to the members of the Assembly by the Commander-in-Chief he included this passage in his speech.

While Dr. Ba Maw was pressing forward against the Japanese on the main front, he also had to settle accounts with us in the rear. Shortly before he was due for election as Adipati the three of us, Thakin Mya, Thakin Than Tun and I, went to see him in his office.

'Now, Ahnashin,' we said, 'we have fulfilled our pledge to support you to the best of our ability, how about the other matter that we mentioned?'

'What is that?' he asked.

'Group dictatorship,<sup>1</sup> of course.'

'Well, what about it?'

'We want to be certain of our position while there is still time. If you don't agree we shall be unable to support you in the election for Adipati.'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Group dictatorship means that supreme power is not vested in one man but in a group. For example, in any matter of importance it is not for the one man but the group to decide.

<sup>2</sup> When Burma was declared independent the Japanese did not want Dr. Ba Maw to be styled President, and he was therefore given the title of *Adipati*, a Pali word meaning Chief. It is the style adopted for the Chancellor of the University.



When Dr. Ba Maw heard this he took up the watch that was lying on the table and was so shocked that he stared straight ahead for a couple of minutes without saying a word. Then he went on, 'But isn't that just what I've been saying. For ages I've been urging the appointment of an Inner Circle. Wasn't it I who first had the idea? Very well, then, form your Inner Circle. It ought to have been formed long ago.'

What he really wanted was to purge our discontent with honeyed words. We knew that this was his object, and, as we quite understood this, you may well ask why we just returned home and accepted what he said. The fact is that we never intended to press Dr. Ba Maw about his promise. We knew that whatever he might promise it was impossible to bind him. He would say just what he liked and do just what he liked. We knew that as well as we knew that two and two make four. Our only object was to let Dr. Ba Maw understand how far we would go in supporting him.

As a matter of fact, even if Dr. Ba Maw had refused us point-blank, we would not have dared to oppose him in the election. For we had trustworthy information that Oseka had instigated some members to vote against him, and that Isamura had threatened them and warned them not to do so. We did not want the Japanese to go stirring up strife between Burmans and then restoring peace by threats. That was their regular trick. They would encourage a man to do something rash. Thinking he was safe enough, he would do it just to please them. Then some other Japanese would lay hold on him. It was all fixed up between them. This trickery made it impossible to be loyal to the Japanese. Moreover, we were well aware that we had no one among us to match Dr. Ba Maw in resisting Japanese pretensions. When Dr. Ba Maw wanted to do anything he paid little heed to danger but had the grit and courage to take strong measures in order to gain

his end one way or another. Although the Japanese tried so often to humiliate him he was never depressed for very long, and if any Japanese trespassed on his preserves, he would try to get his own back without considering anyone's feelings.

At last the day for the election of the Adipati arrived. Isamura as usual was in the Visitors' Gallery. He always used to take note of the speeches and the speakers and made his interpreter pay special attention to vehement speeches as if taking it for granted that they must be directed against the Japanese. But on the day for electing the Adipati he did not come to take note of the speeches but to see that any who seemed recalcitrant should vote in accordance with his instructions. It was certainly not because he was such a great friend of Dr. Ba Maw and was anxious to see him elected. But Premier Tojo himself had said that Dr. Ba Maw was to be elected, and it was in accordance with orders from above that he came to watch over our proceedings. If the choice had rested with him personally, Dr. Ba Maw would have been put away long ago.

When the time came for the voting Kodaw Hmaing nominated Dr. Ba Maw. The effect on the members was as if a million-horse-power engine working continually day and night with its roar and clatter had suddenly stopped at midnight when all was quiet with not even a footstep to be heard. Or it was like being suddenly transported from a place humming with the noise of men and dogs and birds into a tunnel three miles long. Or as if a captain with a troop of soldiers bearing instruments of torture appeared suddenly on the platform in a noisy assembly crying out 'Silence! I've got these things ready for the first who speaks,' and the commotion dies down like fire quenched by water.

The whole hall was stilled. It seemed that in the surrounding precincts even the dogs stopped howling and

yelping, and the starlings who usually filled the trees with their quarrels and chatter in competition with the members in the Chamber were suddenly quieted as if in wonder at the uncanny silence in the hall.

Isamura had got his way and went off with a smile of mockery rather than of satisfaction. But what he really thought is a secret between him and his guardian angel.

## CHAPTER V

### FREE! FREE! BURMA IS FREE!

(1943, 1 August)

ON the evening of 30 July 1943 Dr. Ba Maw summoned Thakin Mya, Thakin Than Tun and me to Government House.<sup>1</sup>

'Now, Thakin Nu,' he asked, 'have you quite made up your mind?'

'It was made up long ago.'

Then turning to Thakin Mya and Thakin Than Tun, he went on, 'There you are. I've been talking to him for ages. That was why I took him with me to Singapore. I talked to him the whole way and could get no further. I've tried my best in every way to persuade him to take office and it seems that nothing remains but to say that he has got to take it. I have in mind the Foreign Office for him. Some day it is going to be a very important department.'

'Well now, Thakin Nu, what do you think about it?'

I replied that I had nothing to add to what I had already said.

'Look at him,' said Dr. Ba Maw to Thakin Mya, 'all

<sup>1</sup> When Dr. Ba Maw became Ahnashin he expected to move into Government House, but Isamura would not submit to the humiliation of having to move out of it. On the attainment of independence Dr. Ba Maw insisted that Government House should be made over to him and obtained orders from Japan supporting his claim. Isamura could not disobey the orders, but represented that it should be redecorated for his reception. When, after considerable delay, the work had been done, he persuaded Dr. Ba Maw that he was safer where he was, as Government House would certainly be the first object of attack by bombers. So Isamura remained in possession until the end. And, unfortunately, it was never bombed and still remains the second ugliest building in Rangoon.

he says is that he wants to be a writer. I had much the same mad idea when I was young, but I've got over it.' —

Thakin Mya just smiled.

'Yes,' I said, 'but after we had got to Singapore and I had heard for a day or two all that you had to say, I came to understand very clearly what we had lost in you as a writer. To tell the truth I admire you more now as a writer than as a statesman, and if you were to give up politics and take to writing it would be a great gain to Burmese literature.'

Dr. Ba Maw smiled, and said that he supposed he must regard my case as settled, and I agreed with him.

After chatting for a while we went home. Later in the evening our Thakin Inner Circle group appeared at my house and I could see that they had all hurried round to see me because of my refusal to accept office. I explained that I had finally settled the whole matter with Dr. Ba Maw.

'That's just like you,' they said. 'You never consult anyone, but go straight ahead along your own line.'

'This isn't the time to put on side about not taking office.'

'We would all like to be in your shoes. It's only because we cannot stand aside that we have had to give in and do our bit.'

'If we cannot get you to agree, we'll behave in the same way. We'll all think of our own good and resign.'

And so they went on for a couple of hours, firing at me with shot and shell from guns and mortars, and as my only defence was that I wanted to be a writer, my ramparts were gradually undermined and collapsed. I held out the white flag and agreed to lay down my arms in unconditional surrender. They appointed Thakin Mya, General Aung San and Thakin Than Tun as an allied council of victory to settle the terms.

There was a choice between the Home Office and the

Foreign Office and some of them wanted me to take the former. But General Aung San urged that the Foreign Office was more important as it would bring us into touch with the outer world, and this was finally decided. So next day I went to Dr. Ba Maw and told him that I would accept the Foreign Office.

On the 31st the Japanese were all very busy. They were very keen on getting hold of the list of Ministers, but so far as possible it had been kept secret. What they chiefly wanted to know was whether the names of Thakin Tun Oke and Thakin Ba Sein were included. About midday a Japanese, Takarno, invited me to feed with him. I was quite sure that he would ask about Thakin Tun Oke and Thakin Ba Sein, and had asked Dr. Ba Maw how I should reply. He said that it would be all right for me to talk to Takarno quite frankly. Takarno was the head of the Japanese Advisers and also the most friendly to Burmans.

As I expected, Takarno asked about Thakin Tun Oke and Thakin Ba Sein. It was the Japanese army that had put him up to testing Dr. Ba Maw on this matter; they were reluctant to approach Dr. Ba Maw direct because they knew he resented Japanese interference. Takarno, too, did not like to go direct to Dr. Ba Maw about it, so he had invited me in order to scrape up a little inside information. But I told him frankly that I had recently learned from Dr. Ba Maw that in no circumstances would he include Thakin Tun Oke and Thakin Ba Sein.

‘I must tell you plainly, Mr. Takarno,’ I said, ‘if the Japanese army insist on the inclusion of these two men, Dr. Ba Maw will resign. He told me himself to let you know this.’

‘No, no!’ said Takarno. ‘There is no idea of anything like that. The Japanese army has no intention of using compulsion towards an independent government.’

Next day the arrangements for independence all went off smoothly except for a little trouble with some over-



GENERAL AUNG SAN





zealous Japanese photographers. The Japanese Commander-in-Chief and other Japanese officials wanted a photograph to be taken showing them together with the Adipati and the new Government. They had asked for a photograph to be taken as soon as the ceremony was over. But the Adipati, for some reason that I do not know, objected to them appearing with us in a photograph. So at ten o'clock, as soon as the ceremony was over, he sent all the Ministers home to breakfast and told them to return at midday. And when the Commander-in-Chief and the Japanese officials appeared to have the photograph taken, there was no one there. Dr. Ba Maw told them that the Ministers had all left and sent them home again. I learned from one of the Japanese officers that this was a great blow to the Commander-in-Chief.

So from the 1st of August I became the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The Minister had an office to himself with his Secretary and Deputy Secretary and Assistant Secretary, and his Foreign Affairs Cadets under training, and his office superintendent and big clerks and little clerks and messengers with all their paraphernalia. When the Minister reached his office all the secretaries and clerks stood up as soon as they caught sight of him — but not the messengers. All the others were well acquainted with official ways and procedure, and there was no reason to complain of them. But the messengers were all raw hands who had been dragged in from anywhere; when the Minister arrived they never thought of standing up but just went about smoking their cheroots. So the Minister had to pretend not to see them.

If you wanted one of these secretaries you need only tinkle the little bell on the office table. In comes the messenger and you tell him to call the secretary. The secretary enters and you explain what you want. There was never anything that he could not do, and everything had to be done by the appointed time. If the Minister

happened to have gone astray, the secretary would not point out the mistake at once. But an hour or two later he would come back and suggest in a roundabout way with a few hints that the Minister might have made a mistake. It was like this not only in office but in every public ceremony. The Ministers went ahead and all the officials, great and small, that they happened to meet behaved most respectfully. At first to a new hand it was all rather strange and embarrassing. But on growing used to it one gradually realized that it had a very agreeable flavour. Oh! it's a pleasant thing to be a Minister.

But I often recalled the story of the Lizard Prince and the weaver girl. Although everyone bowed down before the Minister he had to look out for unexpected pitfalls that would wake him from his dream to harsh reality. If the man who dreamed that he was a king happened to come across one of our good friends the Japanese, he would suddenly wake up to find 'Made in Japan' printed on his forehead. So as far as possible I avoided the Japanese. Yet, however hard I tried to avoid them there were occasions when they forced themselves on my attention. About a couple of days after I had taken office I had to explain the foreign policy of the Government to the newspapers. So I invited all the Japanese and Burman reporters to my office at eleven o'clock. But as there happened to be a cabinet meeting at Government House I could not meet them until half-past eleven. Among the Japanese reporters there was a man called Hasigawa, the reporter for Domei. He had been born and brought up in the United States and spoke English as well as an American. The other Japanese reporters were unacquainted with English. So Hasigawa had prepared a whole string of questions and expected to get a lot more information than all the others. The other Japanese were expecting this and brought along an interpreter.

When the conference opened I set forth my ideas in

Burmese, and all the questions and answers were in Burmese. This put Hasigawa in rather a hole. You can judge his arrogance by the fact that in the middle of the conference he got up and went away. However, that, as you will see, was not the full measure of his arrogance. But the other Japanese reporters praised me warmly, and the Burmese reporters felt that they had scored over the Japanese. Then in the evening, as I was about to leave office, I noticed a paper on my table. When I opened it my eyes nearly started out of my head. It was a letter from Hasigawa to the following effect :

‘Thakin Nu, formerly I held a good opinion of you, but I have quite lost it in today’s conference. After fixing the conference for eleven o’clock you never turned up until half-past. Anyone with a decent sense of politeness would have said a few words of apology to the reporters, but you said nothing. Again it was a deliberate insult to the reporters that a man who can speak English as well as you should address them in Burmese. I want you to understand this very plainly. Reporters are not just common folk. However powerful a man may be the newspapers can break him. So keep this in mind and don’t behave so haughtily again.’

On reading his letter I tingled all over. I could hardly eat my dinner, and after trying to swallow one or two mouthfuls I got up and went away. When I was back in my own room I could not think what to do. I could see nothing but Hasigawa’s rude letter and could not get it out of my eyes. There it was when I was sitting down, and there it was when I was sleeping. My wife did not know what was the matter but could see that I was out of sorts. Even when she came to ask what was wrong I shouted at her as if she had been Hasigawa, ‘Get out ! don’t come and bother me.’ And she said to our small daughter, ‘Come along, San San, your poor daddy has gone mad,’ and led her out of the room.

In my anger I muttered all sorts of threats.

'I hate this beast. I'd like to get him down and trample on his face.'

'But I can't manage that,' I said to myself, and thought of all kinds of ways to get even with him.

Then again I thought of replying to him in the same style. 'I don't care a tinker's curse for an animal like that,' I thought, and all my disgust for the Japanese was stirred up anew. 'It would serve him right to report him to the army.' And then I remembered the limits of my own power and my spirits fell. 'But that would mean a double disgrace.'

By this time it was past midnight, but for shame and anger and disappointment I could not get to sleep. It seemed as if my head would burst. I am very thin-skinned and it is too easy to hurt my feelings. Dr. Ba Maw often used to say that I was like a very sensitive plate in a camera; it shows up the whole room, but it also shows up every speck of dust. If I were to go on with politics my first need was a thick skin.

Clearly, if I wanted to get any rest that night I must manage somehow or other to give vent to my anger. I could not contain it any longer. I just had to write something.

'Hasigawa, I have received your letter. I have been a journalist myself, and understand quite well the power of the press. There is no need for you to teach me. But I want you to understand this. I'm not like other politicians and don't care twopence for anything your newspaper may say. Within three days from the receipt of this note you must come to me and apologize for your rude letter. If you do not apologize I will see that our Government takes suitable measures.'

I wrote to this effect and sent it the next day. After I had sent it I felt a little anxious; it would be rather awkward if the animal did not turn up to apologize. But,

after all, Hasigawa was not a bad sort. Next day he came to make his apologies, and said that, even before receiving my note, he had realized that he had taken a false step through youthful hastiness and had already made up his mind to ask me to forgive him.

It was annoying to have one's pleasure in being a Minister upset, but apart from that it was really good for me to meet the Japanese. For then one had to recognize the 'Made in Japan' stamp on one's forehead. Otherwise, with flattery on every side, one might easily have mistaken our pine-wood independence for real solid teak. Not long afterwards there happened another very similar incident. The parts of Rangoon where traffic was dense were distributed among Burmese soldiers. At that time Rangoon was often being bombed. When the siren went the soldiers had to keep the crowd in order. About midday the siren sounded and all the Burmans obeyed the soldiers. But a certain Japanese would not listen to them. He thought it did not matter to him what a Burman, soldier or no soldier, might say; although the siren had sounded, he was a Japanese and could go where he liked. The Burman soldier, as in duty bound, stopped him, saying, 'Japanese or not, you must stop.' Whereupon the Japanese jumped down from his trishaw and came running at him. The Burman soldier could not depart from his instructions without orders from a superior officer and, as he had no orders to the contrary, he stopped the Japanese with his bayonet, which made a wound about four inches deep.

The news reached me almost at once, but it seemed to me just a routine matter and I took no action. It was really of no importance. The Burman soldier was merely doing his duty. If the man on duty had been a Japanese and the offender a Burman, he would not only have been stuck with a bayonet but arrested into the bargain. So I felt quite easy. But Isamura, who was always out to down the Burmese Government, did not take the matter

so easily. He sent the Japanese Adviser of the Burma Defence Army to tell General Aung San to come that very evening with Dr. Ba Maw or one of the Cabinet Ministers and apologize to Isamura and the Japanese Ambassador for the injury inflicted on the Japanese. About seven o'clock General Aung San appeared at my house.

'Thakin Nu,' he said, 'these sons of bitches say that we must go to them and apologize for today's incident, or they will declare war on Burma or something of that kind.'

'Not a bit,' I answered. 'Really I ought to have called the Japanese Ambassador to my office and warned him that the Japanese are too obstreperous, and we would have to take very severe notice if this kind of thing happened again. And for them to want us to apologize is really beyond the limit.'

'Quite right,' he said, 'but some of these blighters have stuck close behind me and they are now waiting downstairs.'

'Very well, let us go and consult the Adipati.'

When General Aung San and I had come down and were getting into our car a Japanese appeared out of the darkness and asked where we were going. General Aung San shouted back that we were going to the Adipati. As the Adipati happened to have gone from his own residence to Government House we had to go there after him. When we discussed the matter with him he thought that we had better go and settle the matter with an apology. Again as we were leaving his house the Japanese appeared out of the darkness and asked whether we were going to Isamura. 'Yes, yes.' But, as if not yet convinced, he followed close behind our car. By the time that we got to Isamura's house it was about ten o'clock. But Isamura was so bent on getting the apology that he had not gone to bed yet and was sitting up to wait for us. After making our apologies and talking for about ten minutes we went on to the house of the Japanese Ambassador. But it

seemed that the Japanese who had kept springing up out of the darkness was satisfied, as we saw no more of him.

As we talked over the matter on the way I grew more angry.

'Come now, old man,' I said, 'what about taking this ambassador down a peg or two?'

'Have at it, my lad,' said General Aung San. 'It's all the same to me.' When we got to the house of the Ambassador we found him waiting in the drawing-room to receive us.

'Ahem!' I began. 'If I must speak plainly we have not come here of our own will but because we were pressed to come by a Japanese official. And really now that we are here we have nothing to say.' And we both of us just sat up very stiffly. This must have flustered the Ambassador who was looking forward to hearing us apologize. But he had a good deal of diplomatic experience and listened to us with a polite smile. So we had a cup of tea and came away. And I fancy we left him wondering what kind of men Dr. Ba Maw appointed to his Cabinet.

Again shortly afterwards there was the matter of the flag on my car. It had been arranged that Ministers should carry a flag on their cars, but I had never done so. My driver kept on at me for permission to hoist a flag. 'One looks so small without it,' he said. But I had my own reasons. I was afraid that I would be put to shame if the Japanese gave any trouble when I had my flag up. Finally, however, the driver begged me so earnestly that I agreed to show a flag on my car when going to office. At the first turning the Burmese policeman saluted me and I called out to the driver, 'Hey, man! you were quite right; we are much more important with a flag.' But a little further on from just by the Kamayut police station a Japanese military policeman told our car to stop. A Japanese General was to come along that day. Thakin

Ba Hein, who was sitting beside me, had been to Japan and spoke the language fluently. 'This is the Foreign Minister,' he said, 'on his way to office.'

'Is that so?' replied the policeman. 'Good, good; then you can just stay where you are.' And he would not let us go any further. Both Ba Hein and I simply sweated with shame. And it was all the worse because it was just in front of a Burmese police station. 'All those policemen must be laughing at us,' I thought. 'This must be a great joke for them.' Just then a breeze sprang up and, when our flag streamed out before it, I felt angrier and still more ashamed. 'It is all because this blasted driver would not leave things alone.' And I vented my anger on him and shouted to him to drive straight home. As soon as I got home I tore the flag off, and I would not take the car again that day, but went to my office by taking a boat across the lake.

This kind of thing happened so often that in the end I went down with dysentery and was confined to my house. Early one morning Bo Let Ya turned up and asked if I had heard the news. And he went on to tell me that on the evening before some Japanese had got into Dr. Ba Maw's residence in order to assassinate him. This was most surprising and I asked him to tell me all about it.

'Last night,' he said, 'when the siren sounded, a Japanese and a Burman came to the house, telling the sentries at the gate that the Japanese was a military policeman and they had seen a light in the house and thought it might be a spy. The sentries were quite taken in and even let them have a gun. The Adipati had a great stroke of luck. He had taken refuge in the shelter and, as he thought that nothing would happen, had come out again and went into the house just when the Japanese came into the compound. If they had met him down below it would have been all up with him. Meanwhile the Japanese said there was a light upstairs; he called out "Spy, spy," and got the



little Burman sentries to let off some shots. These soldier boys have got no sense. The Adipati called them to come to him, but they made off saying that they were going to their captain Bo Yan Naing. I feel horribly ashamed about it all and have half a mind to cut my throat. Still we have arrested the soldiers.'

I asked what had happened to the Japanese. Bo Let Ya told me that the Adipati had phoned Colonel Hiraoka, who had come and arrested him. He had even made as if to shoot Colonel Hiraoka, but a Japanese soldier who came with the Colonel was too quick for him. I suggested that it looked like the work of Isamura but Bo Let Ya did not feel sure of this.

One day, about a month after the Preparatory Committee had been set up, I happened to be present when Dr. Ba Maw consulted a very famous Indian palmist. He was chiefly concerned to ascertain whether he would be secretly assassinated. The palmist could find no sign of assassination but told him that he was destined to go into a foreign land and to suffer great hardship and poverty. I could hear what was said, and from then onward I understood that Dr. Ba Maw was apprehensive of being assassinated if he went on working with the Japanese. The course of the enquiry revealed that the would-be Japanese assassin was a man called Asahi, a follower of Isamura, who had especially brought him over from Singapore in order to kill Dr. Ba Maw. The Burman who came with him was a follower of a notorious bad hat, Po Tok of Lammadaw. As the case was quite clear our friend Isamura was transferred to Singapore so as to preserve appearances. Asahi and his follower from the Japanese army were sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment. But as a matter of fact they were kept in a house where, as many people could see quite plainly, they were plentifully supplied with food and women. After a while they were sent to Singapore. As for the Burman accused who had accompanied them,

thanks to the protection of the Japanese he could spend all his time in an opium den with a revolver at his waist abusing Dr. Ba Maw from the doorway. That was our 'independence'. Even when there was an attempt to kill the Adipati he could not touch the assailant with the tip of his fingers because he was a Japanese. And, worse than that, he could not even touch one of his own subjects who enjoyed the favour and protection of the Japanese.

Shortly afterwards a new Commander-in-Chief, General Kimura, invited the Ministers to call on him in batches of two and three, and asked if they had any ground for dissatisfaction with the Japanese. I took the opportunity to speak to him very plainly.

'You people say that you have given Burma independence,' I said. 'But from the very day that independence was declared up to the present I have never regarded it as real independence. The other Ministers have told you of the interference that they have experienced in their own departments, so I need not repeat what they have said. I only want to say just one thing. This so-called independent Government has not been able to lay a finger on some Japanese and Burmans who tried to assassinate the head of our country. It is all very well to say that we could not punish a Japanese because of the army and so on. Leave all that aside. But among the would-be assassins there was a Burman and the Government has not been able to lay a finger on him. So where is your independence? If a Burman were concerned in a plot to assassinate you, you would grind him to dust without waiting to consult the Burmese Government, wouldn't you?'

I went on like this in the presence of some other Ministers and let him know just what I thought. The Commander-in-Chief could make no reply and could only nod his head as if in assent.

But Dr. Ba Maw was not the kind of man to give in easily when he wanted to get something done. As soon as

I had recovered from my dysentery he sent me to the Japanese Ambassador to find out whether we could not arrest the Burman criminal even if we could not touch the Japanese. He flushed red with anger and replied, 'As the representative of the Japanese Government I must object. From the day when it was decided that no one should deal with these accused the case was closed, and it cannot be reopened.' Though he spoke very stiffly I think that he was not really so angry as he made out, but did not want to argue the matter any more and therefore frightened me off. And on reflection I recognized that he had guns to back him and I had nothing better than a cultivator's knife. So I smiled and came away.

I told Dr. Ba Maw all that had happened and he had to put up with it. But next day he told the Commissioner of Police, Rangoon, to arrest the Burman accused under the Defence Regulation. But the Japanese military police took such good care of their man that for all his efforts Dr. Ba Maw could not manage to get him arrested; all he could do was to store up the incident for future reference. On the former occasion I had got the better of the Japanese Ambassador, but now it was his turn.

While I was resolving to get my own back a good opportunity presented itself. It was now very nearly time for the wedding between Bo Yan Naing and Tinsa Maw, the daughter of Dr. Ba Maw. At every big ceremony there is a lot of fuss about precedence. The Ambassador and the Commander-in-Chief wanted to sit on the right hand of the Adipati. But Dr. Ba Maw himself wanted to give the seat on the right hand to Netaji Bose. The Japanese got round the men who first arranged the seating to place the Japanese on the right-hand side. The Adipati was very angry. He sent me to discuss the matter with the Japanese Ambassador, and as he did not feel too sure of me, he also sent the Minister U Tun Aung. After a few preliminary remarks, U Tun Aung broached the

subject by saying that the Foreign Minister had something to discuss. So I explained that, as he was only the representative of the Japanese Government while Netaji Bose was the actual head of the Government of India, the latter and not the Ambassador must be in the place of honour. And, after I had put the matter quite bluntly like this, there was nothing more to say. But it seemed as if I had given the Ambassador a direct hit on the chest, he flushed quite red and could not speak for about three minutes.

U Tun Aung intervened to save the situation. 'It's like this,' he said, 'we've invited some Manipuris to the wedding. We want to show them that we are giving their leader Bose his proper place. Then we will ask them to give us a document by way of recognition and, if we use this for propaganda, it will be a great help in the present battle at Imphal.'

The Manipuris to whom U Tun Aung referred were really no more than the two or three Brahmans who had been invited from Mandalay to join the hands of the young couple in the wedding ceremony. If he had not happened to think of this and joined in to patch up the trouble, the heavy blow that I had delivered might have been awkward for me and all of us. For about five minutes U Tun Aung did his best to laugh off the effect of my words. But for all his jokes, the Ambassador remained stuffy, and for three or four minutes he refused to smile.

During the year that I was working in the Foreign Office there were only these three matters of any importance: apologizing for the Burman soldier; negotiating for the arrest of the Burman accused in the plot against the Adipati; and arranging precedence at the wedding. Otherwise there was nothing worth mentioning. From the day when independence was declared there were numerous telegrams to the Axis powers. But this was all trifling business. At first I used to glance at the drafts put up by the secretaries, but as this soon became burdensome I

stopped it and told them to deal with it themselves without showing the drafts. However, the wires were so numerous that before long the Foreign Office came to be known as the Telegraph Office. We noted down in a calendar the national days of every country and the birthdays of statesmen and that kind of thing, so as to send off our wires punctually. And we had to acknowledge the receipt of similar messages from other countries.

But the Foreign Minister had one other duty besides sending off telegrams. He had to greet foreign visitors and to see off departing officials. I found all this very trying. I can talk freely enough among my own friends, but when strangers are present I can't utter a word. Before the students' strike in 1936 I could hardly eat if there were a stranger at the table. General Aung San, who was so notorious for his rudeness when he was displeased, was very ready at any kind of a party with yarns to test the wit of his boon companions. Even Thakin Mya, who was known among us for his taciturnity, could make things go in his own way. Thakin Than Tun was quite the cleverest among us at this kind of thing, and on festival occasions both the Adipati and U Tun Aung were good mixers. I looked on and did my best to rival them, but had to give up because the words would not come out. The Adipati and the others were always chaffing me about this. I remember the Adipati laughing at me, 'Thakin Nu doesn't drink and he doesn't smoke; there's just the one thing that he's any good at.' So whenever possible I used to try and get U Tun Aung to come along with me to greet visitors.

CHAPTER VI  
MINISTER OF INFORMATION  
(1944-45)

SHORTLY before I left the Foreign Office I put in a lot of work on trying to link up the East Asia Youth League with the Government. But I found this very difficult because some members of the League were very much afraid that Dr. Ba Maw intended to swallow it. One day about July 1944 I gave a talk at one of their meetings and tried to persuade them not to go on wasting their time.

‘If you want to play a part in history,’ I said, ‘it is not enough to do a little cleaning up and sweeping, or to build a few air-raid shelters, or to open one or two libraries. You must do your best to build up physical and mental and moral strength in order to provide leaders for a future generation. When Hitler’s Government came into power, wasn’t it the young men who made history? So you should do all you can to take advantage of your present opportunity. There is really no good reason to fear that Dr. Ba Maw will swallow you up. Within a year the English will be back again and the Japanese will have to clear out. And when the Japanese clear out Dr. Ba Maw will have to clear out with them. So, if the English are to be back within a year, how much time has Dr. Ba Maw got to swallow you? But, if you turn the year to good account by helping the Government, you will have the benefit of your experience.’

But for all my efforts I had no success. Yet, though I did not succeed, it was because there was an honest

difference of opinion and there was no ill-feeling on either side. The Japanese, however, were anxious lest the Youth League should join up with Dr. Ba Maw and they came butting in. At one time there was a rumour all over Rangoon from some unknown source that it would join him, and a Japanese threatened Ko Ba Gyan, the leader of the Youth League, with all sorts of penalties.

After being at the Foreign Office for about a year I asked Dr. Ba Maw either to let me resign or to transfer me to some other department. It is true enough that life at the Foreign Office was very pleasant. There were three of us, the Assistant Secretary Ko Myo Min, and a cadet under training, Ko Htin Fatt, and we were all interested in promoting the welfare of Burma and the advancement of Burmese culture, letters and science and so on, and day after day we spent in discussing such matters and writing. It was all most enjoyable. But I wanted a transfer to another department, because on thinking things over I felt rather ashamed of my position. In other independent countries if there was any subject for discussion with a foreign ambassador, not merely the Minister or Deputy Minister but even the Secretary could call him to the Foreign Office to discuss it. But in Burma we received the Japanese Ambassador on his first arrival and he came to call on us once afterwards. That was all we saw of him at the Foreign Office. If I wanted to discuss anything I had to go to his office, but if he wanted to discuss anything the Foreign Minister was not good enough and he went over his head direct to the Adipati. If he had any business with the Foreign Office he would not come himself, but only sent his Chargé d'Affaires. I much disliked having to put up with these slights, and as I could not escape being affronted I wanted to clear out.

This reminds me of something else that happened just before my transfer from the Foreign Office. This was some

trouble with the Domei reporter about the battle of Imphal. The Japanese were confident that they would soon be victorious, and a reporter (not Hasigawa but another man) came to arrange for propaganda in Chungking. I undertook to have it ready. But on the same afternoon I received a note from him requesting me to write one and a half pages of foolscap including six points that he mentioned. I was so angry at his trying to teach me my job that I tore up his note. I wrote a short proclamation of about ten lines and after telling the Deputy Secretary to send it I left him to deal with the matter. It seems, however, that the reporter was disappointed and, as the Deputy Secretary could not pacify him, I agreed to receive him.

We all sat down and he asked whether I had received his note. I told him that it had reached me all right. He replied that he had hoped I would include all his six points. I expressed my regret at not being able to do so, and he asked the reason.

‘If I write to your dictation it will not be my proclamation but yours. So please understand that when I write anything I write what I think fit. The people at Chungking are not just fools. If you really want a proclamation by me there it is. If you like it, take it; if you don’t like it, leave it.’

The reporter went off disgruntled. I don’t know how the news reached the Adipati, but next day he urged me to write a proclamation and gave me a draft that he had written.

‘I’m not going to stand this animal coming and trying to boss me. Besides if I had written what he wanted I would have stirred up a row like fishwives quarrelling. And how could I write that kind of thing to Chungking. We have never had any quarrel with Chungking. Chungking has never acted badly towards us. On the contrary, we have much to make us grateful to them. How could I write a lot of nonsense?’



‘Certainly,’ replied the Adipati. ‘You must write what you really think. So just write what you like, but let them have something.’

So I went home and wrote a proclamation of about a couple of sheets of foolscap with the help of Ko Htin Fatt, the cadet under training. A couple of days later I gave it to the Domei reporter together with the proclamation given by Dr. Ba Maw. My own proclamation appeared without amendment, but in Dr. Ba Maw’s there was a reference to ‘our friends in Chungking’. When it reached the Ambassador there was an exchange of notes about this phrase between the Ambassador and the Adipati, but when the Japanese had to retreat from Imphal the whole matter was buried.

Not long afterwards I was transferred to the Greater Burma Department, but, owing to some disagreement, I moved on again to the Information Department. The Japanese newspapers soon wanted to ascertain the views of the new Information Minister and, as they were continually pestering the secretary, I appointed a day for a press conference.

‘Burma and Japan are far apart by sea,’ I said, ‘but at the present time Burmans and Japanese are much further apart. Now why do I have to insist on this? When the war began Burmans had a great respect for the Japanese. They gave them as much help as possible. Even the former Commander-in-Chief, General Iida, stated that it was through the help given by Burmans that they had been able to finish the battle of Burma so speedily. He was quite emphatic about that. But now some ninety-five per cent of Burmans no longer respect the Japanese. If you want to bring the Burmans and Japanese together again, it is not enough just to shout, “We are on the side of the Burmans”, “Love Japan” and so on. The Japanese must really and truly change their whole attitude towards Burmans. So long as your military police continue to be

so rough and your traders so greedy, there is no chance of any mutual agreement between Burmans and Japanese. So if the Japanese editors really want Burmans and Japanese to get on well together, you must accept the responsibility for it and urge the Japanese in Burma as strongly as possible to change their attitude.'

I don't know if they expected me to talk a lot of nonsense about Burma doing its best to help Japan win the war. But usually when I called for questions at the end of a talk there would be a stream of Japanese questions. This time they just lolled around with a superior look on their faces. So the conference was soon over. But my secretary, U Tun Sein, was a good deal smarter than his Minister, and he immediately saw what was going on in their minds. As soon as I left the room he got hold of three or four of the most responsible editors and explained that I was a plain blunt man who liked to speak his mind, and that I was so keen on friendliness between Burmans and Japanese that I discussed it with them daily. He tried to pass off the matter and patch it up in this way. He may have succeeded in pacifying some of them, but certainly not all; for they went and reported me to Major-General Ichida, who had succeeded to the post of Isamura. They even reported falsely that I had refused to hold any more conferences with the Japanese. Ichida in turn reported it to the Adipati. But my staff showed up very well. When a military policeman made enquiries they bluffed him so stoutly that the Japanese could not make up their mind one way or the other.

Not long after this affair of the Japanese there was another troublesome job. This concerned the pongyis. I found that some pongyis used to come along with a little bag and find their way to this minister or that on business that had nothing to do with the monastic order. This made me feel very uneasy. Sometimes they asked for the removal of a headman or a township officer or other official.

Some pongyis even came to me and asked for the removal of a headman.

‘But, your Reverence,’ I would say, ‘does it not occur to you that you may be falling into a deadly sin. Perhaps you had better go back to your monastery and resume your religious discipline and studies.’

I would get rid of them in this way. Also I got a newspaper to open its correspondence columns to a discussion whether this kind of thing was the proper way for a pongyi to behave. And a pongyi wrote to the effect that any pongyi who did so should be blamed. After one or two letters had appeared some elders on the Central Buddhist Church Council took umbrage, and reported the matter to the Minister for Religious Affairs. Before long it reached the ears of the Adipati. So taking this into account with the matter of the Japanese editors the Adipati decided that I was not suited to the Information Department. He thought it far more serious to hurt the feelings of the pongyis in whom he trusted than to annoy the Japanese editors. So he urged me to go back to the Foreign Office, but as I objected very strongly the matter was dropped.

Of course, I had no wish to injure any pongyi but I honestly felt that these pongyis were injuring themselves. In my opinion a pongyi should be solely concerned with his religious discipline and duties. I could not stand their interfering in politics and other worldly affairs. I may be wrong but I firmly believe that men who lean on pongyis in politics are mere opportunists; they can’t stand the work and worry of politics themselves and so they take a roundabout road and try to drag in the pongyis.

A pongyi is not like a man. On the narrowest view of his obligation he must comply with the 227 rules of discipline, and in a broader sense with many million rules as well. As our Lord the Buddha said, to lead the life of a monk is as delicate a task as to balance a grain of mustard seed on the point of a needle. So how can a pongyi, who

must walk so delicately, do the work of a politician, the roughest of all worldly pursuits? Even a pongyi who is shut off from mankind and complies with the monastic rules and discipline must frequently do penance for his shortcomings. How can one suppose that a pongyi who mixes in the world of men can possibly find time for self-purification by duties, discipline and penance? And the men who drag pongyis into this kind of thing should be pitied because they do not understand how sinfully they are acting. A pongyi who joins one sect is cut off from pongyis of another sect, and anyone who acts so as to create divisions incurs the awful penalty involved in schism. It is astonishing that anyone should incur this penalty merely for the sake of getting some little job. And although the pongyi can escape the penalty by doing penance, this does not relieve the guilt incurred by the man who made use of him. And it must be very difficult for worldly pongyis to escape the consequence of transgressing this very exacting discipline.

One evening about three days after the pongyi difficulty Dr. Ba Maw telephoned me to come round at once if I were disengaged. It sounded so urgent that my heart began to thump. When I got there I could see that he was seriously perturbed, and he at once asked me anxiously if I had ever given a letter to Nyo Tun.

‘Never!’

‘You’re quite sure?’

‘Absolutely certain.’

‘Just think a bit. You have never given him any kind of a document with your signature on it?’

‘I’m quite certain. I have never given him anything of the kind.’

The Adipati gave a huge sigh of relief and leaned back upon the sofa. I asked what it was all about.

‘I have just heard from U Tun Aung that Ichida had been round to tell him that Nyo Tun had come back from

India to Arakan ; the people had risen against the Japanese, and the military police had reported from Arakan that he was said to have a letter from Thakin Nu. The Rangoon military police got this news by wireless today. Nyo Tun is said to have crossed over to Taung-up ; the military police are after him and will certainly catch him within three or four days. That is what Ichida told U Tun Aung and it would be a bit awkward if they found a letter from you in his possession.'

I told the Adipati not to worry as I had never given him anything.

'If they don't find a paper or anything as evidence there is nothing to fear. If they come to you, just tell them that you know nothing about the matter. I'll see to all the rest. But you had better go and see U Tun Aung. And we may as well kill two birds with one stone. I have prepared three draft regulations and the Japanese army have asked me to hold them over. But I mean to push them through. So if you go on tour and pave the way for them it will be a good thing.'

'What is all the talk about the Japanese traders making another attempt on your life on account of these three regulations ?'

'The military police told me of that,' he said. 'But they can do their worst. Ever since I got out of Mogok Jail I have been lucky to save my skin, so that doesn't worry me. Now, can you spare the time to go on tour ? Henzada U Mya and U Ba Cho are going out in that direction to preach about Greater Burma. You may as well go with them.

'There are three main points. The first is "Our Government", the second is "Our Property".

"Our Government" means that it is the Government of Independent Burma. Everyone in Burma, man or woman, must place their trust in a government that is really Burmese from the Adipati down to the ten-house elder. Anyone

who looks for help to the Japanese army or military police will be severely dealt with when the war is over. And they can see that it is an independent government because it is able to publish these three regulations.

““Our Property” means that everything in Burma really belongs to Burmans. Expand these two points when dealing with the first two regulations.

‘The third point you should bring in is that this is “Our War”. If you put that in also the Japanese will be less suspicious and you will find it easier to get about, obtain boats and so on.’

I agreed to do this and took my leave, saying that I would consult U Mya and the others about the arrangements. As I was leaving he again told me to go and see U Tun Aung about the Nyo Tun affair. When I met him next day I said that it looked as if the Japanese had sent Nyo Tun, as he had seen them shortly before leaving for India. In that case, he thought, we had better go and see Ichida, as it seemed their men who had sent him were now saying that it was my doing. But on going to Ichida’s house we could not find him.

The three draft regulations were: the Regulation about Immoveable Property; the Companies Regulation; and the Marriage Regulation.

According to the Immoveable Property Regulation only Burmans could own immoveable property in Burma; no one except a Burman could have any interest in it.

The Companies Regulation provided that no company of any kind could be formed in Burma unless 60 per cent of the capital was Burmese.

The Marriage Regulation provided that whenever a Burmese woman married a foreigner the Buddhist law should apply on both sides, the husband’s as well as the wife’s.

If you want to know why the Japanese traders were so angry as to plot the assassination of Dr. Ba Maw, a glance

at these regulations will explain it. That he should dare to act in this way after one attempt on his life is a good instance of his force of character. His determination to impose his will on the Japanese whatever might happen and despite the danger was very gratifying to us who were supporting him.

Before these drafts could be published as Regulations they had to be considered by the Advisory Council. Some members objected that it would be a waste of time to discuss the regulations as the Japanese would probably refuse to let him confirm them. But the Adipati told them to consider the drafts and leave the rest to him. So he bided his time, and when the Allies captured Meiktila he thought that the time was ripe for publication. The Japanese were all in confusion and we would profit by their difficulties. So he forthwith confirmed the Regulations. All that the Japanese could do was to ask to be allowed to reconsider them if they should wish to do so afterwards.

The root of the matter why the Japanese hated him so much was that they suspected him of being an English spy. Some of the men who hated him were very persistent. They sent in all manner of charges and all kinds of reports to the military police office and army headquarters. And not merely in ones and twos but so many that the men who had to read them could hardly help taking them as well-founded; they came in from this quarter and that, and bore this, that and the other man's signature. There was a regular flood of them. One day a man came to my office and sent a message that he wanted to see me secretly. According to his letter, he was a spy from the English army and he gave his number and so on, and he wanted to see me on a confidential matter. I told him that I was too busy but I would see him if he came again, and he left his address. On making enquiries at the address, I found that he was an Anglo-Burmese half-caste in the employ

of the Japanese military police. He also tried to pump other leaders. As he seemed likely to be dangerous I directed the police to arrest him under the Defence Regulation. But, as he was a hireling of the Japanese military police, I do not know whether he was ever arrested ; however, he did not come to me again. But it must have been in order to find out whether Dr. Ba Maw was a spy for the English and Americans that he tried to pump us.

Apart from trouble stirred up by outsiders, there were other differences between Dr. Ba Maw and the Japanese. One was the attempt to place Japanese on a level with English as a second language in the schools. Another arose out of the requisitioning of cattle. When the Japanese wanted a hundred, Dr. Ba Maw would say that cultivation was more important and persuade them to take only fifty. And if they wanted a hundred viss of cotton, he would put them off with thirty or forty. And, because he thwarted their wishes in so many ways, they were all the more suspicious of him. But about all this Thakin Than Tun is better able to write than I am, as he was chiefly concerned. That Dr. Ba Maw had not the slightest contact with the English and Americans no one knows better than Thakin Than Tun and I. We discussed whether or not it would be a good thing to consult him about the insurrection against the Japanese and decided that, if he approved it, he would give us all the help he could, and, if he did not approve, we were confident that he would not hand us over to the Japanese. So Thakin Than Tun took the responsibility of explaining what we were doing and we asked for his advice.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘it looks as if Thakin Than Tun and his lot are playing with fire. So be careful. I don’t want to stop anyone from doing what he thinks right. But you had better not tell me any more about it, so that I can have a clear conscience. The only thing that I care about myself is independence. The Japanese granted us independence, so I accepted it. If the English promise independence I



will consider their offer.' And whenever we tempted him he talked very vaguely and closed the subject. But, although he spoke like this, he protected the rebels not only against the Japanese but against his own officers. For instance, the District Officer of Insein caught a rebel with papers in his possession about the resistance movement. As he did not know what to do, he ran off to the Adipati who sent him back with secret instructions not to let the Japanese know anything about it, but to watch the progress of the movement quietly. If the Japanese had got to know about this scrap of paper from Insein it might have blown up the whole of Thakin Than Tun's fine edifice. But the next day the Adipati called me and asked me to warn Than Tun that he was being too rash. Apart from this remonstrance I heard nothing more about it.

CHAPTER VII  
THE RESISTANCE MOVEMENT  
(1944, August)

THE resistance movement really started from the very first days of the Japanese occupation. One very important factor was the reconciliation between Burmans and Karens. In this matter General Aung San and Thakin Than Tun were especially energetic.

Between the departure of the English and the assumption of control by the Japanese, some thakins in the Delta seized the chance to run riot. Consequently the Karens in general took all thakins for criminals and regarded them as enemies. So it was not so easy as you may think for General Aung San and Thakin Than Tun to bring the Karens and Burmans together. The task of reconciliation began as soon as the leaders had established military administration. Some of the Karen leaders were invited to come to Rangoon. Among them were Dr. San C. Po, Saw Ba U Gyi, Dr. Po D. Lon and others. In all this preliminary work Thakin Than Tun was most industrious. He arranged for the Do Bama-Sinyetha Association to give them a reception and tea-party. He and the other thakin leaders said how greatly they regretted that some thakins had behaved so badly, and explained that it was all because the thakin leaders were in jail and there was no one to control or direct them. Now it was a question of life and death for Burma and no time for mutual ill-feeling; their only safety lay in unity, and the thakins were ready to do all they could to achieve reconciliation. He explained all this very openly and honestly, and seemed

to make some impression on the Karen leaders.

From all they had seen and heard they had come to regard all thakins as bullies and blackguards and they expected to find the thakins at headquarters much the same. So when they met them on friendly terms they were very much surprised, and quite openly expressed their astonishment. One of the Karen leaders, Dr. Po D. Lon, said that the incidents in the Delta were not just Burman wickedness, but were only the result of instigation by the Japanese. So the Burmans were acquitted and the Japanese found guilty. From that day the path towards reconciliation gradually became easier. And by arranging tea-parties and so on for the more responsible leaders of the Karen Youth Movement we were drawn closer together.

As between General Aung San and Thakin Than Tun, the former had a magnetic personality and when strangers met him they were immediately attracted. All the Karens that he met trusted him implicitly, and came to respect him. Thakin Than Tun was excellent on the administrative side. It was he usually who made the arrangements for meetings with the Karen leaders and the Karen youth. And he could stand a lot of work and worry. Anything that he started he would go at enthusiastically until he succeeded. So for the great progress of the Karen-Burmese reconciliation that was so important for the resistance movement we have to thank the magnetic personality of Aung San and the brains of Than Tun.

When I went to the Delta to preach the doctrine of 'Our Government', 'Our Property', 'Our War', Thakin Than Tun told me to do all I could to promote the reconciliation movement, and gave me a few tips. At Bassein I arranged with Dr. San C. Po to give a talk at Peya-thonsu. Here I happened to come across the general commanding the Japanese Delta army, a certain Lieutenant-General Ahniya. He invited me to tea, and I had only just arrived and barely had time to sit down when he started off on a

long harangue for about half an hour. He just kept on the whole time, saying a good deal that was objectionable.

‘Burmans never give us any help. We got a lot of help in Manchuria, but you Burmans only talk a lot of nonsense. Here you are wasting your time on going round preaching. What we want is deeds and not words.’

He went on like this until I got angry, and cut in by asking how long he had been in Burma, and where he came from. He was annoyed at my interrupting him and said angrily that he had been here a year and came from Manchuria.

‘So you know what happened in Manchuria,’ I said, ‘but in Tokyo General Iida, who actually fought here, vouched for the help that we had given.’

‘All this help you talk of,’ he replied angrily, ‘what do you ever do to help us? We tell you to make roads, and you don’t make them. We tell you to build bridges, and you don’t build them. Do you call that helpful? Your Burmese Government only goes on talking nonsense.’

‘But how can we give you any useful help? You Japanese always come poking your noses in. If you would only give the Burmese Government a free hand we could do a lot to help you.’

This made him angrier than ever, and he stamped on the floor. ‘Just listen. Don’t interrupt. Dr. Ba Maw is about as much use as my little son. Send General Aung San to me, and stop preaching. If you dare to fight, come to me and I’ll show you what fighting is like.’

While the old man was talking, his anger gradually evaporated and he quietened down. But whether he was mad or whether he was calm it was a bit hard to put up with him. However, we had tea and his aide-de-camp quietly asked me not to be annoyed with the old man; he did not really mean what he said and it was just his way of talking. While he was making these excuses the old man smiled.

'Don't mention it,' I said, 'old men talk like that and young men must put up with it.'

And the old man kept on smiling. So I asked if he were coming to Rangoon. 'I can't manage to come yet,' he answered, and then, still smiling, 'They say Mountbatten is coming, so I must stay here to meet him.'

But Thakin Lu Tun who happened to be with me was so angry with the old man that he actually began to shed tears.

When I got back to Rangoon I was told that the old man had seen a good deal of fighting and had a very uncertain temper. It was said that when he was in a bad mood he would have his subordinates, even a Major-General, tied up and whipped. When I heard this, a shiver went down my back to think how lucky I was that he had not had me tied up and whipped.

At Peya-thonsu the school was full of responsible Karen leaders and elders who had come to hear me lecture. General Aung San, Bo Let Ya and other army leaders had been touring in those parts in the cause of reconciliation. So by this time there was a fairly clear road ahead. Saw Ba U Gyi, one of the Karen leaders who accompanied me, remarked that formerly anyone except a thakin could come freely into that neighbourhood, but no thakin would have been allowed to come. This showed how much General Aung San, Bo Let Ya and Thakin Than Tun had done to achieve reconciliation.

As in other Burmese villages the people appeared desperately poor. Some hardly had enough clothing, some looked as if they had not enough to eat and some were covered with itch. So there was a great deal of truth in Saw Ba U Gyi's parable of the two muzzled oxen. While the cattle are treading out the grain the cultivator muzzles them lest they should eat it. They can see the grain but cannot eat it because they are muzzled. Then in due course the cultivator gathers up the grain in his barn and

turns the cattle loose. And all they do is to begin goring one another. In Burma the soil is so rich that for all the sixteen millions of Karens, Chins, Kachins, Shans, Taungthus and Burmese there is more than enough to eat and more than enough to wear. But, like the oxen, the Burmese have been muzzled and so also have the Karens, Shans, Chins, Taungthus and so on; they could see a large fat ham, but their bellies remained empty; they hadn't enough to eat, or to wear or anything. And when they were set free they went for one another like fighting cocks. So I exhorted the Karen elders to work with all their might for unity, as it was by unity alone that we would all be able to have our own household goods and property and attain our rights.

In Sakhangyi, a Karen village in Myaungmya district, the people greeted us like long-lost cousins. They invited us to breakfast very courteously, and we asked them to dinner with apologies that we could only provide such food as we happened to have brought along with us. And we finally parted with mutual regret like close relations.

I am a dreamer, a writer. So although my thoughts were fully charged with hatred for the Japanese I did not go on from thought to deed. The man of action was Thakin Than Tun and he pressed forward steadfastly. He sent a force to link up with the Chinese army and, when they were driven back by malaria, he did not relax his efforts, but looked for some other means. He never came to ask me about anything and I knew merely what he told me. One evening he appeared at my house to say that Thakin Tin Shwe had returned and asked if I would like to see him. On my agreeing to do so he came back with him on the same evening. This Thakin Tin Shwe was a man whom Thakin Than Tun had sent to India along with Thein Pe. He brought letters from Thein Pe and Comrade Joshi, the chief secretary of the Communist Party in India. He was about to return to India, and

Nyo Tun was to go with him. Nyo Tun was living in a small hut in my compound, but until that evening I had heard nothing about his going with them. I told Than Tun that he was a pretty quick worker, dragging off a man from my house even before I knew anything about it. But he only smiled.

Then he asked me if I would like to go to India and I asked him to fix it up. He told me to wait until the next time and he would arrange for me to go by plane with my whole family. But it was merely on the spur of the moment that I had agreed to go, and, when I came to think over the matter, I could not make up my mind.

About four or five days before Nyo Tun was due to leave he had a stroke of good fortune. He met two Japanese officials from the Information Department who wanted him to go to Arakan and induce it to break away from the Burmese Government. It seemed to him that here was his chance. So he accepted the commission. The Japanese officials gave Nyo Tun the necessary documents from the Information Department with a letter of protection and a pass allowing him to move about freely. An English gunboat was to wait for them on a fixed date on the Arakanese coast. The gunboat exchanged a few shots with the Japanese coastguards, but although it shelled the coast quite heavily the men who saw him off were lucky enough not to get hurt.

At that time Thakin Ba Hein was living with me, but I had only the barest inkling of what he and Thakin Than Tun were doing. When Nyo Tun was about due to leave, he and Thakin Ba Hein fixed up a nonsensical phrase to be broadcast from New Delhi, announcing his safe arrival, 'Grandfather Hare has reached the House of Orion'. I was allowed to listen to the wireless from anywhere. On the first day that the news was to come through I did not happen to listen at the right time, but Thakin Ba Hein picked up the message and told me. So next day I took

care to listen and heard the words, 'Grandfather Hare has reached the House of Orion'.

I was in with all the plans of our group, however secret they were and however dangerous. But I was not an active partner. In all our discussions we were like brothers discussing family affairs that concerned the whole family, including those who took no active part in them. There was much that I approved and much that I disapproved. When I disapproved I said so quite plainly. But however much I disapproved, the others could be quite confident that I would never give them away or get them into trouble. And, because they trusted me so firmly, I knew everything that was at all important, though I was not worried with minor details.

About three or four days later General Aung San and Thakin Than Tun came to my office. At that time Thakin So was hiding in Pyapon District where he was spreading the resistance movement against the Japanese. At General Aung San's request we brought Thakin So to Rangoon and the General, Thakin Than Tun and Thakin So came to an agreement about the several responsibilities of the Burma Defence Army and Thakin So's resistance movement.

As Thakin So was wearing the uniform of a Captain in the Burma Defence Army it would have been difficult for any stranger to recognize him. He stayed in a house in Bauktaw, and was given an armed guard from the Burma Defence Army so as to resist any attempt by the Japanese to arrest him. After a few days he moved over to my house. Next morning I went to the Adipati, and without telling him where Thakin So could be found, suggested that he should give him some appointment and tell the Japanese that Thakin So had left the resistance movement and was about to join the Government. The Adipati may have resented my coming to teach him his job and sent me back, merely saying that he understood and would see to what was necessary. So I felt more or less relieved from



anxiety about Thakin So being in Rangoon. Yet in point of fact he was like a man walking in a jungle infested with poisonous snakes, for by this time thakins who knew Thakin So very well had become hirelings of the Japanese military police. When Thakin Tin Shwe came to Rangoon a thakin who was working for the military police recognized him and gave information to the Japanese.

About three or four days before I met Thakin So, Ba Hein disappeared from my house. I suspected that this was in connection with the resistance movement. So, when I saw Thakin So, I asked him to send Ba Hein back as I was under suspicion from the military police because Nyo Tun had disappeared from my house and they would be still more suspicious if Ba Hein also disappeared. About two days later he reappeared though I never learned where he had been nor how he had got back. But four or five days after Thakin So had left, Ba Hein disappeared once more. And, when I questioned Thakin Than Tun about it rather anxiously, he disclaimed all knowledge of the matter. When my fears were somewhat allayed I consoled myself with the idea that they probably thought no one mattered very much when such great things were on foot.

A couple of days or so after Ba Hein's disappearance a conference was held at my house. Among those present were members of the Inner Circle, Thakin Mya, General Aung San, Thakin Than Tun and Thakin Chit. When the General read out his long proclamation entitled 'Rise and attack the Fascist Dacoits!' we all approved and supported it. The army would take the responsibility for printing it, and distribute it to the revolutionaries all over Burma, who would pass it on to those who were well disposed towards the resistance movement. It was from that day that the Burma Defence Army was systematically linked up with the revolutionaries outside the army.

So the course of events brought us to March 1945.

when General Aung San, Bo Let Ya, Thakin Than Tun, Kyaw Nyein and Thakin So suddenly appeared one evening at my house. Thakin So carried one of the weapons they call a tommy-gun. When we were all assembled Thakin Than Tun produced a flimsy sheet of paper with a document in English printed on it. It was to the effect that on 18 March Thakin Than Tun was to meet a certain Major Carew over on the Toungoo side to discuss matters. It would not do for him to come back to Rangoon and he would have to go underground. So then we had to consider the position of General Aung San and myself after his disappearance.

Everyone agreed that when Thakin Than Tun disappeared General Aung San and I ought to disappear as well. And that, too, was my own opinion. So I agreed to disappear at the same time as Thakin Than Tun, and Bo Let Ya undertook to be responsible for placing my family in hiding. There was of course no idea that when I went into hiding I would handle a gun. Everyone who knew me was well aware that in that kind of thing I should be worse than useless, because I would be just a hindrance to the others. So Thakin So told me that as soon as I arrived he would use his wireless set to commandeer a plane to take me to India or somewhere. The reason why they wanted me to go was to shelter me from the wrath of the Japanese and the danger to my life. About three or four days afterwards a messenger from Thakin So came and took off the baggage that I had got ready for him.

It came about that Thakin Than Tun had a splendid opportunity to leave Rangoon. The Adipati himself suggested to Bo Let Ya that it would be well for Thakin Than Tun to relieve the suspicion of him entertained by the military police by undertaking war propaganda round Toungoo. So Thakin Than Tun, when the time came, went to Toungoo and vanished. The guard at his house would report his departure as a matter of duty, but some



THAKIN THAN TUN



time elapsed before the military police realized that he had gone underground.

Now it was time for Bo Let Ya and me to disappear. But as the time grew near I began to hesitate. The reason for hesitating was my connection with the Adipati. Only recently, after we had been discussing the general situation, he had remarked to me that although I was a thakin the Japanese regarded me as being more closely in his confidence than many of his own followers, the damas. So I began to think that if I disappeared without warning him it would be a nasty jar. Also, from my first appointment as a Minister, I had pledged my loyalty to him and I could not lightly break this pledge. On the day that we were due to leave Rangoon I explained the circumstances to Bo Let Ya and that, whatever happened, I must let the Adipati know before I left, and I persuaded Bo Let Ya to wait a couple of days.

As I was very persistent in this matter Bo Let Ya could only look on as he was unable to stop me. I quite recognized that I was putting Bo Let Ya in a very nasty hole. I had not the slightest fear that the Adipati would hand me over to the military police; Thakin Than Tun had often consulted him quite freely on much more important matters. But just about then so many men were disappearing that the military police were on the alert. Anyone who meant to go underground had to snatch his opportunity and, let alone an hour or two, every minute was of importance if one would escape their clutches.

I think I must have rather an unusual temperament. Even my closest friends found me difficult and recognized that they must make allowances for me. A little incident that happened at Pantanaw is a good illustration of my indecision. Next door to me there lived a man called Khin Maung who bred fowls, and a large cobra used to come and eat his eggs and chickens. Of course it was dangerous too for his household, and they often ran down

from the house shrieking, 'Snake, snake!' As we lived so near, my household too was frightened. One day Khin Maung saw the head of the snake poking out of a rat-hole near the latrine and pinned it to the ground with a dart. He came rushing to me to bring my big gun as he had stuck the snake with a dart. As soon as I heard him shouting I jumped up and got my gun. But I had gone barely half-way when it occurred to me that if I injured the snake I should be transgressing the precept 'Thou shalt not kill', and remembered the text that 'All living creatures are subject to their destiny'. So I turned back with the gun. Just as I was putting it away it occurred to me that if I spare the snake it will bite men; 'Fate won't save you from pricks if you tread on thorns'. So I took up the gun again and with a heavy mind set out to shoot it. But just as I was going to fire the snake shook itself free and disappeared. They say that a man who wants to rule must learn to be tough, and that is certainly true of politicians, and especially of revolutionary politicians. So what hope is there for a man who is always hesitating? Whenever my friends tried to drag me into politics I used to tell them this little parable.

Two days after I had put off Bo Let Ya, when I was due to leave, I went to see the Adipati. For two or three minutes he remained silent, gazing upwards reflectively. Then, sighing deeply, he said, very sadly, 'I suppose you had better go into hiding, Thakin Nu, if you feel like it. As things are I am hardly in a position to protect you, and before long it will be as much as I can do to protect myself. So there you are! If you want to go into hiding, do so. As for any kind of promise that you pledged to me I give you full absolution.'

'But if I go into hiding, won't the Japanese be doubly suspicious of you?'

'They won't trust me any more because you remain. When do you propose to go?'

I told him that I was off at once, and he asked me if I had a secure refuge. When I said that it was safe he warned me, 'Be careful whom you trust. You are inclined to be too trustful. Some people will tell all they know under a little pressure from the military police.'

I bowed to him very respectfully as if for the last time and took my departure.

But then something else cropped up to prevent me leaving Rangoon with Bo Let Ya that evening. So when I met him I told him to go straight away and as soon as he had arrived in Pyapon he could send a man to call me. And it was just as well he did leave, for at dawn next day the military police surrounded his house and if he had still been at home he would have had his throat cut.

I had made all ready to leave as soon as Bo Let Ya's man came to call me. But the day before he arrived Hla Maung and Kyaw Nyein suddenly appeared at my house and said they thought it would not do for me to disappear. 'If you go into hiding Thakin Mya won't be able to manage everything by himself. But if you stay it will be a little easier to get round the Japanese. And you will be wanted, too, when the Japanese withdraw from Burma, to prevent them from ill-treating the men whom they are now holding.' They pressed me so strongly that, when the messenger from Bo Let Ya arrived next day, I sent him back with a message explaining the situation.

One night, a few days later, I was aroused about two o'clock in the morning by someone calling just underneath the window at the head of my bed. I woke up with a start, wondering sleepily what the noise was, and suddenly it made me jump as I recognized that the voice was Japanese. I heard an interpreter calling out:

'Thakin Nu, Thakin Nu, please come along down. Major Takashita wants to see you.'

'Now they've got me,' I said to myself, and put on the warm clothes that I had made ready. 'Quick, quick! It's

very urgent,' he said. So I dressed hurriedly and woke Ko Chit who was sleeping in the same room, taking him down with me in case there might be some instructions to give him. Standing at the door were the Major, the interpreter, two military police with fixed bayonets and a military policeman dressed up as a Burman. As soon as I opened the door the Major gave me a note in English, apologizing for waking me at such an untimely hour, and asking me to come at once to the Japanese army headquarters as they were afraid that my life was in danger from the enemy. The same night the Adipati and all the Ministers had a similar message offering them protection. As soon as the Japanese had first heard that the enemy had designs on Dr. Ba Maw's life they had offered him a Japanese guard in his residence but he had refused. According to the Japanese, he was so much against having Japanese in his house that he would not even let them come there to protect him. So this time they acted without consulting him. But the Adipati and Thakin Mya believed that the real object of placing a guard over them was to see that they did not desert and also to report to Japanese headquarters all our goings and comings and all our visitors.

So we arrived at the 22nd of April. About nine o'clock in the morning the Adipati phoned for me to come to him. When I arrived I learned that he had sent also for all the other Ministers, but as yet no one had come. He said the Japanese were withdrawing and would abandon Rangoon on the following evening. He advised me not to come with him as I did not get on with the Japanese, but I was not to mention this to the other Ministers. However, I rejected this advice as there would certainly be many thakin leaders on the Moulmein side whom the Japanese had caught before they had managed to get away, and I had undertaken to protect them. But I would not follow him outside Burma. Shortly afterwards the other Ministers arrived and, when the Adipati asked our intentions, I said that I would come with him.



## CHAPTER VIII

### THE JAPANESE WITHDRAW

(1945, April to August)

THE Burmese Government was continually asking the Japanese army when it would withdraw from Rangoon. It was on the Burmese Government that the responsibility lay to arrange for a timely withdrawal so as to protect its officials and the people from the dangers that fighting would involve. But to all its enquiries the Japanese would only reply that there was no intention to withdraw. From men working in the offices engaged in recording by wireless the movements of planes some Ministers learned that these offices were to be transferred to Bangkok. There was news also from Bassein that the telephone wire and barbed wire were being rolled up. So at a Cabinet meeting the Ministers decided that the Japanese army should be requested to furnish definite information, and Thakin Mya and U Tun Aung were charged with this business. But although they explained that these circumstances led them to believe that the Japanese contemplated withdrawal, the Japanese still lied to them deliberately, alleging that the removal of these offices to Bangkok was merely to facilitate their work, and that there was as yet no intention of withdrawing.

But at length on 22 April the Japanese army stated that it would withdraw on the following day. In the first instance the only Ministers who agreed to accompany the Adipati were U Tun Aung, Bandula U Sein, U Hla Pe and I; the others all refused. Although Thakin Mya and U Lun Baw decided in the conference at midday to remain in

Rangoon, it was arranged in the evening that they would go with the Adipati to Moulmein.

On the 23rd we all had to pack up. But first of all there was a job of work to do. We had to arrange for the release of U Ba Swe and another man who had been arrested by the Japanese military police. I ran off to consult the Adipati and he sent Bo Yan Naing with the Japanese liaison officer and me to Major-General Ichida and the head of the military police. Meanwhile Kyaw Nyein and Hla Maung had gone to see Colonel Hiraoka, where they were soon joined by Ichida. Hla Maung knew a little Japanese and, while Ichida and Hiraoka were discussing the case, Ichida kept on muttering 'Bad, bad!' This terrified them and they came running greatly flustered to urge us to lose no time. So we went back to the Adipati who called up Bo Yan Naing to ascertain what was happening. When Bo Yan Naing reported that the military police had promised to release them in a day or two I went home greatly relieved.

We set off in the evening and we were told by some Japanese acquaintances a couple of days later that within an hour of our leaving the police station it was machine-gunned from an English plane. The cars provided for us were worn-out contraptions that the army had commandeered from Japanese traders, and some of them broke down with engine trouble or burst tyres within a few miles of Rangoon. Our own car got nearly to Pegu when the tyre burst. As we had no spare wheel, we could go no further and had to take refuge in a roadside hut. Early next morning a lorry appeared which took us on to Pegu.

The drivers of the cars had not been told by the Japanese owners where they were going, and had not even been allowed time to say goodbye to their families. Our own driver had no clothes with him but a little vest, and came to me very unhappy. So I told him to remain behind and shift for himself without troubling about us, as the

Japanese would have to provide us with some kind of conveyance.

We arrived in Pegu about 7 A.M. and put up in the house of a friend. About nine o'clock we heard a couple of planes. Just as the owner of the house was telling us that they came along every day, as if it were no matter, we heard the sound of machine-guns. They made about three circles, firing all the time, and the Japanese soldiers returned their fire from below. There was a small dug-out in front of the house and another one behind, but they were very small and we were very many, so some of us had to remain huddled up in the house. Then six more planes appeared. The Japanese soldiers let off at them in full blast. There was only the road between us and the centre of the firing. The planes came round one after another as if they were playing hide-and-seek, and each as it passed sent in a volley. 'Dok, dok, dok, dok', said the planes; 'Pauk, pauk, pauk, pauk', replied the dug-out. All this 'dok, dok, dok', 'pauk, pauk, pauk' within a couple of hundred yards of us was almost enough to split our eardrums. Sometimes the planes fired first and sometimes the Japanese. Sometimes they would go both on at once 'dok, dok, dok', 'pauk, pauk, pauk' for half a minute. It was all very thrilling. But I don't know what they hit. Every now and then they would drop some bombs. These fell so near that they not only shook the shelters, but filled them with a cloud of dust. After the second bombing we put the women and children into the only car available and sent them to a place about a couple of miles out of Pegu. During the next few hours, we were bombed by planes five times; by six o'clock in the evening the whole neighbourhood was brilliantly illuminated by the fires caused by the bombs, and every now and then we heard an explosion, apparently through a bomb hitting a magazine.

At night we were to set off under cover of the darkness.

But our engine had broken down and we had no car. A Japanese, Lieutenant Mori, who had been placed in charge of us, finally got hold of an army lorry with four or five soldiers. Into this he shoved Dr. Ba Han and his family, U Tun Aung and his family, and me and my family, so that we were packed like sardines; but we could not do anything about it as he was too drunk to listen to us. There was no room for the baggage, and we had to leave it to be looked after by my driver, but we have seen none of it again from that day to this. After about three hundred yards the tyre burst, perhaps because the car was overloaded. The drunken lieutenant made the driver go on, but half a mile further on the tyre came off and left only the rim and we had to stop. But we were all crammed into another lorry and reached Waw at midnight. Here there was such a jam of cars that we could go no further, so we got down and managed to snatch a little sleep in a hut about half a mile away. But about 1 A.M. we were suddenly awakened by a loud explosion, and set out to walk along the railway line from Waw to Abya. Here we had another short doze and then slowly made our way to a little stream that we crossed by raft about seven o'clock in the morning. Hardly had we reached the other side than a couple more planes appeared. We pushed into some scrub jungle and took shelter. Some soldiers close by us rashly began to fire at the planes, and would not stop although we sent a military policeman to prevent them. It is a wonder we were not all blown to bits. The two planes, however, were quite happy bombing the thickly packed motor-cars at Waw and we found our way to a temporary monastery that was close by. Some pongyis had been compelled to leave their monastery as it had been taken over by some Japanese soldiers, and had built this shed of thatch and grass to serve as a monastery for the time being.

About three o'clock it began to drizzle and we were just saying that with this rain the planes would not return

when suddenly two planes appeared and flew low over our refuge, firing at some Japanese soldiers and their cars. In the monastery with us there were some Japanese soldiers, and these kept on impatiently getting up and moving about, despite our shouting at them. This was not out of bravado but sheer stupidity. They did not know how to keep out of danger. The two planes circled round our little monastery time after time, looking at it suspiciously from all sides.

The little monastery had a roof but no walls. It was wide open on every side and the planes came down so low that they could see into it quite clearly. As they came round so often to look at us but went off without firing, we could only conclude that they did not attack because of the women that they saw among us. You would never believe how stupid these Japanese were; the noise of the two planes had hardly died away when all the soldiers in the monastery shouted and ran back into the village.

At nine o'clock we got into a little railway trolley that was intended especially for our party. A Japanese soldier who had been wounded in the arm tried to get in and our Japanese conductor could not put him off with words; he had to push him off forcibly and he rolled head over heels down the slope into the borrow-pit. Similarly, on leaving Pegu, a soldier with a broken leg had tried to force his way into our lorry and he pushed him out. There is room for only one idea at a time in a Japanese head. If the trolley was only for us, then there was no room for anyone else, even cripples. About an hour later we heard a shot at our trolley. The Japanese said it was from the Burma Defence Army, so we jumped down, and the Japanese made a small earthwork on the railway line and the firing went on for about half an hour. When the firing broke out my small boy of five years old was terrified and clung to me closely, but as soon as it was over and we got back into the trolley, he said, 'If they start again, Daddy, don't get down; what

is there to be frightened about ?' And despite the situation we all burst out laughing.

About seven miles before the Sittang the trolley broke down, and once again we had to get out and walk. The whole road to the Sittang was crammed tight with cars. Soon after reaching the river we managed to get taken across in a motor raft. If four English planes had come along the Japanese would have been slaughtered in heaps ; the crossing lasted about fifteen minutes and one could only take one's life in one's hands and trust to Providence. If only a single plane had appeared we would have been blown to bits. All along the bank there was nowhere to hide and nowhere to run. And there were no guns to drive off the planes. Each soldier was provided only with one grenade. If anyone was wounded by shell or shot and the pain was more than he could bear, he could blow himself up. That really was a brain-wave !

We had heard from the Japanese Ambassador that there had been a serious dispute as to the withdrawal between the Japanese Commander-in-Chief, General Kimura, and his Chief of Staff, Lieutenant-General Tanaka. The former intended to make timely arrangements so as to ensure an orderly retreat, but the latter had strongly protested, and it was only on 22 April that his orders had been cancelled and the retreat undertaken, so that in all this confusion military discipline had collapsed, and we were involved in the disorder that resulted. The Adipati lodged a strong protest with the Japanese Ambassador, who undertook to report the matter to Japan as soon as we reached Moulmein. I do not know who was actually responsible, but shortly afterwards Tanaka was recalled to Japan, and Lieutenant-General Shidayi appointed to succeed him.

In the afternoon we arrived at the house which the Japanese had allotted to us on the far side of the Sittang. Next morning about half-past five we were suddenly

woken up by a loud explosion which flustered the Japanese, so we were immediately bundled off to a place in the jungle about two miles from Mokpalin railway station. Here we heard more planes, and shouted ourselves hoarse to try and get the Japanese soldiers moving about in the road to come and take shelter. Out of sheer bravado they would pay no attention. But just when the plane came overhead they ran towards us. It crossed right over the hut and the soldiers, thinking they were spotted, ran across the road; while they were crossing it another plane followed and my heart went into my mouth. I could see it coming straight at us as I peered out through a hole in the mat wall, and my heart began to thump, thinking that we were done for.

For about two hours some dozen planes were bombing and machine-gunning the cars along the road and the railway engines near the Mokpalin railway station. This was the most terrifying part of our whole journey. The Japanese were so rash or so stupid that the best we could hope for was not to be seen by the planes that came flying in quite low down just over our hut. When the planes were firing all round Mokpalin railway station we could see them quite clearly through the gaps in the wall matting. Even while the planes were all round us the Japanese would start the engine of a car. A plane would come along and we could hear ten or fifteen shots, 'dok, dok, dok'. And then the car was silent. It would not have mattered to us that the Japanese were so devoid of common sense, but we were only three hundred yards away and hardly dared to breathe.

About an hour after the planes had departed Lieutenant Mori came to tell us that the car in which we were to have ridden had been bombed; he could only find places on a trolley for the women and children, and the men would have to follow them on foot. Finally, however, room was made for us in a truck full of wounded soldiers and we

continued our journey. Next day we hid in the jungle and in the evening we set off again. We had nearly reached Yin-nyein station when we heard machine-guns not far off and had to get down. As our truck had no step by which to get down and we had to carry the two children, my wife Ma Mya Yi and I were always the last two to leave. When getting down at Yin-nyein she twisted her ankle and was unable to run, but there was a little shelter alongside the railway. It would hold only one man inside and we all had to remain standing.

About half an hour later we had a phone message to say that the planes had left. So we started off again, but there was more firing, and we made ready to jump down. But the truck would not stop as it had no brakes, and we had to stay where we were. However, shortly afterwards there was another burst of firing. By this time the truck had lost its momentum and was moving quite slowly, so everyone jumped out. As usual Ma Mya Yi and I with the two children were the last to leave. I took the elder child and she carried the younger. As soon as I landed on the ground I bolted straight ahead of me and forgot Ma Mya Yi until the plane came back again, when I looked round and saw Ma Mya Yi with the baby still standing by the truck. I shouted to her to come, but she could not move because of her twisted ankle. So I ran as quick as I could, caught hold of the child and told Ma Mya Yi to get on my back. We had just started back with the child in my arms and I was dragging her behind me when the plane returned again; we all threw ourselves flat on the ground, and were lucky enough to tumble into a small ditch. The plane circled round about six times firing at the engine and some of the bullets glanced off and came whistling over us. It was no use crying and all we could do was to laugh.

The Japanese seemed to think that the planes would go away if they hit the engine. So each time the planes



came round they let off steam and stopped it after the planes had left. But, as the men in the plane must have guessed that the steam could not have been turned off without human hands, it seems unlikely that they were so stupid as to be tricked in this way. And in our hiding-place we enjoyed a good laugh at this clever device. When the planes had left we resolved to stay where we were and leave the Japanese to do what they liked. As the women could not stay in such a lonely place I suggested that there must be some thakins in the neighbourhood who could put us up. On enquiry we learned that in Katun there was a man Thakin Kyan who would be able to give us a lot of help.

It was only because I was so frightened by the machine-guns that I had been able to carry the two children. As the danger became more remote, my resolution failed and I could hardly walk. However, we managed to get hold of a bullock cart. As we were starting off a plane appeared and followed the train that we had just left. Then about five minutes later there was a loud explosion and we thanked our guardian angel that we had not gone on by train. We arrived at the house of Thakin Kyan about midnight. He immediately recognized me, but we did not explain who we were and made as if we were just weary and unfortunate travellers. While the others were talking about the withdrawal of the Japanese, Thakin Kyan called me aside to ask why we had come; 'Thakin Nu,' he said, 'what is it all about? Have these blighters tried to arrest you? If you want to hide I can manage it for you quite safely without fear of anyone splitting.' I was astonished that he should know me, and after chatting about various matters we rested that night in his house. Next day he found a place for us in a larger house belonging to a girl who had met me when she came to Rangoon to join the Women's Service Corps.

Some four days later the Adipati and his party arrived.

We had lost touch with them even before we reached Pegu. They had been delayed because his daughter, the wife of Bo Yan Naing, had given birth to a girl in Kyaikto. The baby was then only two days old. After waiting a week in Katun we went on to Moulmein. The whole bazaar had been ruthlessly bombed on the previous day. On our arrival it was pitch dark and the rain was pouring down in torrents. It was quite impossible to see the road, and the whole length of it we kept on knocking up against the corpses of men and dogs and a litter of broken metal and glass. Then, as the town was bombed for two days in succession, we moved on to Mudon.

There was nothing wrong in Mudon except an epidemic of itch. There was no work to do, and anything to be done was monopolized by the Japanese. I tried to obtain the release of the revolutionary leaders whom the Japanese had arrested, but whenever I spoke they put me off with polite excuses. For instance, they said one man was seriously ill with consumption and continually vomiting blood; no one even dare go near him. So we asked that he should be sent to Mudon where we could look after him. They were quite agreeable and promised to do so. But a week later they told us that he had been killed when Moulmein was bombed. When we reached Moulmein the military police were just beginning to arrest suspects wholesale. So a Minister's Council was held and the Adipati drafted a formal communiqué of which one copy was sent to the Commander-in-Chief and one to the Japanese Ambassador, notifying them that ours was the lawful Government of Burma and that no Burman was to be arrested without first consulting the Burmese Government; only on this condition could they take part wholeheartedly in the war. We also invited the army to send a responsible agent to discuss this matter but we had no reply. However, in the neighbourhood of Mudon the insolence of the military police was somewhat abated.

About two months later we heard from the Japanese Ambassador that as a result of pressure by him the army was going to send a reply. But right up to the time of the Japanese surrender we heard nothing further. However, 'if the rat dies one need not ask if the cat killed it', and we had to console ourselves with the reflection that although we got no answer the trouble was relieved.

Not long afterwards we had reports of a new trouble. We heard that two men were touring round the countryside near Moulmein proclaiming a monarchy. According to their proclamation, the Adipati was dead, the Ministers were under arrest, and they were going to capture Rangoon and set up a king. They were already provided with a pretender. The Burmese Government had, in fact, arrested these men for proclaiming a monarchy about two months before we left Rangoon. The Japanese were behind the movement, and just then there was a hard tussle between them and the Burmese Government. The Burmese officials responsible for arresting them were doubtful whether the Japanese would allow it and did so only under the direct orders of the Adipati to deal with it personally. The case went up to army headquarters, but General Kimura was then so fully occupied with the war that the Japanese had to give in. When the men saw that they could get no help from the Japanese they petitioned the Adipati and he ordered them to be released. So I suppose it was because of this old grudge that they again proclaimed a monarchy. When the Adipati reported the matter to the Japanese for them to take action, Major-General Ichida replied that the men were not rebelling against the Adipati but helping on the war. The Adipati was not going to put up with this excuse, and reported the matter to the Ambassador, who blamed the army and warned them that this was no time to disregard the Burmese Government. The officer who had stirred up the movement was transferred to Bangkok.

The Japanese Ambassador, Ishi, was a perfect gentleman. He very well understood the high-handed attitude of the Japanese army and the difficulties experienced by the Burmese Government. Whenever we went to him for help he did all he could, and when we asked about the war he told us all he knew quite openly. The only thing of any importance that we did at Mudon was to set up an Independence Monument to mark the completion of two years of independence and plant some trees round it. I spent my whole time reading books that I borrowed from the Moulmein Library. On 12 August I called on Dr. Ba Maw, and while I was talking with him a plane flew quite low over his house. On the previous day two planes had flown half a dozen times low down over Mudon. Now they came backwards and forwards over his house, and he remarked to me that we had better take care as they were flying very low. So we moved from the verandah to an inner room. Shortly afterwards another plane flew over ; and we went downstairs. Before we had got into the shelter, another plane came and we ran off to take refuge in the shelter. Then another plane came and machine-gunned the house, and then still another, which not only fired machine-guns but dropped three bombs that fell in a garden about three hundred yards off. We had not yet realized that the planes were deliberately attacking Dr. Ba Maw's house, but a Japanese shouted out to us that they were aiming at it. So we ran off to another shelter that was rather further off. And getting over a couple of barbed-wire fences my trousers were torn to ribbons. But after the planes had come round about four times more they disappeared. For the past three months there had been no attack on Dr. Ba Maw's house and it was very strange that they should attack it with machine-guns and bombs when the war was practically over. The whole house was damaged beyond repair, and Dr. Ba Maw had to move to another house. But he remained quite calm

and was not at all shaken, and the same afternoon he even went to look on at a football match.

On the evening of the 14th Dr. Ba Maw called all the Ministers to his house and read them a letter from the Japanese Ambassador telling them of the atomic bomb, the entry of Russia into the war and the Japanese intention to surrender. I was thrilled with delight at the thought that the war and all its dangers had come to an end. But then my thoughts turned to thirty resistance leaders who had been executed only some ten days ago, and was very sad to reflect how very nearly they had escaped. The letter from the Ambassador warned us that the news was very secret as it had not yet been communicated to the troops, and the Adipati also impressed this on the Ministers. But, ever since the attack on Dr. Ba Maw's house, my wife Ma Mya Yi had been unable to eat or to sleep, and was in a constant state of alarm. So I thought it might help her if she knew the war was over, and as soon as I got home I whispered to her, 'Ma Mya Yi, the Japanese have surrendered, the war is over'. She was thrilled with delight. But it was not because the war was over; it was because this was the first time that I had ever told her a political secret.



## GLOSSARY AND NOTES

*Adipati*: The title adopted by Dr. Ba Maw as Head of the State in Independent Burma.

*A.F.P.F.L.*: Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League — an all-party combination formed by General Aung San in August 1944 to organize resistance against the Japanese. It remained a secret underground movement until February 1945.

*Ahnashin*: The title adopted by Dr. Ba Maw as Chief Executive under the Japanese prior to the grant of independence.

*Dama*: The 'private army' of Dr. Ba Maw's Sinyetha group.

*Do Bama*: The party organization of the thakins.

*Galon*: The name assumed by the rebels in the peasant rising of 1931; subsequently appropriated by U Saw as his distinctive personal style to signify his uncompromising demand for independence.

*Gandularit*: The classical name for China in Burmese literature.

*Kempetai*: The Japanese military police.

*Myo-chit*: The name, signifying 'patriotic', adopted by U Saw for his extreme nationalist group.

*Sinyetha*: The name adopted by Dr. Ba Maw for his group of personal followers to express their claim to stand for the 'Poor Man' or the 'People'; subsequently it was linked up with the Wunthanu faction as the Sinyetha-Wunthanu party.

*Thakin*: The name adopted as their personal style by many of the younger nationalists. Formerly *thakin*, 'master', was a term of address usually reserved for Europeans, and the adoption of it by Burmans was intended to show that they claimed equality with Europeans and stood for complete independence.

*Wunthanu*: The main nationalist party from which other groups from time to time split off.

## WHO'S WHO

- AUNG SAN: b. 1916; B.A., Rangoon, 1938; General Secretary, Do Bama Party, 1939-40; escaped to Japan, 1940; Commander, Burma Independence (later Burma Defence) Army, 1942; Minister for National Defence, 1943; organized A.F.P.F.L., August 1944; President A.F.P.F.L., 1945-47; joined Allies, February 1945; Deputy Chairman of Governor's Executive Council, 1946; Negotiated Agreement with U.K., January 1947; assassinated, 19 July 1947.
- BA CHO (Deedok): b. 1893; Deputy Inspector of Schools, resigned 1921; journalist; founded *Deedok Journal*, 1926, and *Deedok Magazine*, 1927; founded Burma Journalists' Association, and Fabian League, 1936; member of Goodwill Mission to China, 1939; strongly anti-Japanese; Member of Privy Council, 1943; Executive Councillor, 1946; assassinated, 19 July 1947.
- BA GYAN, U: b. 1909; B.A., B.L., Rangoon; school teacher; practised law, 1939; President of East Asia Youth League (now All Burma Youth League) since 1942; Cabinet Minister, 1948; resigned; now practising law.
- BA HAN, DR.: b. 1890; brother of Dr. Ba Maw; M.A., Ph.D., D.Litt., barrister; ed. Rangoon, Calcutta, Cambridge, Bordeaux and Freiburg; Head of the Burma Special Research Commission, 1944; President of the Finance and Economic Board, 1944-45; Emeritus Professor of Law, University of Rangoon; now practising law.
- BA HEIN: Student leader, and a fervent communist; died of malaria, Mandalay, 1946.
- BA MAW, DR.: b. 1897; Ph.D., Bordeaux; school teacher and barrister; defended Galon rebels, 1931; leader of Separation Party, 1932; joined Wunthanu (National) Party, 1934; Member of House of Representatives, 1936-40; Education Minister, 1934; formed Sinyetha Party, 1936; Prime Minister, 1937; resigned, 1939; jailed for sedition, 1940; escaped, 1942; Head of Executive Government (*Ahnashin*), 1942; Head of State (*Adipati*), 1943-45; left Burma (1945) with



- Japanese and subsequently detained in Japan; returned to Burma; at present leader of Mahabama Opposition Party.
- BA PE, U: b. 1885; ed. Burma and Calcutta; journalist; editor of *Sun* newspaper; member of G.C.B.A.; founded Wunthanu (National) Party, 1921; Member, Legislative Council, 1923 onwards; Minister of Forests, 1930-32 and 1934-36; Minister for Home Affairs, 1939-40; anti-Japanese; A.F.P.F.L., Councillor, 1945; Minister of Commerce, 1947; now Independent opposition.
- BA SEIN (THAKIN): b. 1910; a founder of the Do Bama Party; seceded, 1934; caught when escaping to Japan and interned; Councillor for Transport and Communications, 1942; deported by Japanese, 1943; reorganized Do Bama Party, 1946; Minister for Communications, 1947; refused to sign Aung San-Attlee Agreement; reorganized the Do Bama Party as the Burma Democratic Party; now in opposition.
- BA SWE: Now a leader of the Socialist Party and Minister for Defence.
- BA U GYI: Karen; landowner and barrister; worked for reconciliation with Burmese; joined Karen National Defence Organization (KNDO), 1947; rebel leader, December 1948; killed in battle, 1951.
- BOON SWAN: Formerly a Township Judge; resigned to enter politics; member of Dr. Ba Maw's Sinyetha Party; Deputy Commissioner under Japanese; now practising law.
- BOSE, NETAJI: Also known as Subhas Chandra Bose; recognized by Japanese as the Head of Independent India.
- BOSE, RAJ BEHARI: Brother of Netaji Bose.
- CHAN HTOON: Now Attorney-General.
- CHIT, THAKIN: A schoolmaster in Mandalay, fervent nationalist.
- HIRAOKA: In charge of Rangoon during the Japanese occupation.
- HLA MAUNG: Student leader; worked in the Japanese Headquarters; now Ambassador to the People's Republic of China.
- HLA PE: Karen; Deputy Speaker, 1941; Minister under the Japanese; now with Karen rebels.
- HTIN FATT: Formerly Assistant Township Officer; ex-Director of Information; now a journalist.
- ICHIDA: Major-General; succeeded Isamura as military head of Burmese-Japanese Relations Department.
- IDA: General; the first C.-in-C. Japanese forces in Burma.
- ISAMURA: Major-General; military head of Burmese-Japanese Relations Department.

ISHI : The last Japanese Ambassador to Burma.

JOSHI : Indian Communist leader ; native of Burma.

KAWABI : General ; succeeded Iida as C.-in-C., Burma.

KIMURA : General ; succeeded General Kawabi as C.-in-C., Burma.

KODAW HMAING (THAKIN) : b. 1876 ; monastic education ; doyen journalist and author ; Burmese lecturer, National College, 1920 ; joined Do Bama Party ; member of Independence Preparatory Committee and Privy Councillor during Japanese régime ; received title of '*Alinka Kyawswa*' 1951, for distinguished services to Burmese literature.

KYAW NYEIN, U : b. 1915 ; B.A., B.L., Rangoon ; prominent in 1936 students' strike ; Cabinet Secretary and later Vice-Foreign Minister under Japanese ; Resistance leader ; Central Executive Member of Socialist Party and General Secretary, A.F.P.F.L. ; has held various ministries ; Deputy Premier, 1948-49.

LET YA, BO : Military training in Japan, 1941 ; Second-in-Command of Burmese forces under the Japanese ; a leader of the Resistance Movement ; Minister for Home Affairs and Defence and Deputy Premier, 1948 ; now in business.

LUN BAW (THAKIN) : b. 1898 ; ed. Rangoon and Calcutta ; school teacher and lawyer ; joined Do Bama Party, 1936 ; member, House of Representatives ; interned, 1941 ; Minister during Japanese régime ; member of Constituent Assembly, 1947 ; Executive Councillor for Foreign Affairs, 1947 ; Chairman, Public Service Commission, since 1947.

MO-GYO (Col. Suzuki) : Japanese Military Instructor to Burman refugees ; recalled to Japan for pro-Burmese attitude.

MYA, THAKIN : Member of House of Representatives, 1936-40 ; organized Peasants and Workers Party, 1938-39 ; member of Wunthanu Party ; interned, 1940 ; executive without portfolio, 1942 ; Deputy Prime Minister, 1943 ; member of Executive Council A.F.P.F.L. ; President, All Burma Peasant Organization ; President, Socialist Party, 1945 ; Minister for Home and Judicial Affairs, later Finance and Revenue ; assassinated, 19 July 1947.

MYA, U : b. 1892 ; wealthy merchant of Henzada ; Member, House of Representatives, 1937 ; Member of Independence Preparatory Committee ; Privy Councillor, 1942-45 ; Member of Constituent Assembly, 1947 ; Minister for National Planning, Commerce and Industry, 1947-48 ; now Member of Parliament and a leading businessman.

- MYO MIN : Secretary, Foreign Office, under Japanese ; Professor of English, Rangoon University.
- NAGATA : Second-in-Command, Japanese forces in Burma.
- NE WIN : b. 1910 ; member of Do Bama Party ; went to Japan for military training, 1941 ; Brigadier in Burma Defence Army ; a leader of the Resistance Movement ; Lt.-General, Burma Army ; Minister for Home Affairs and Defence, 1949 ; C.-in-C. Burmese Armed Forces.
- NU, U : b. 1906 ; B.A., Rangoon, 1929 ; school teacher ; joined Do Bama Party, 1930 ; student leader ; interned, 1940 ; Foreign Minister, 1943 ; Information Minister, 1944 ; Vice-President, A.F.P.F.L. ; Speaker of Constituent Assembly, 1947 ; Deputy Chairman, Governor's Executive Councillors ; President of A.F.P.F.L., July 1947 ; first Prime Minister of Independent Burma since Jan. 1948 ; author of numerous plays and novels, etc.
- OSEKA : Japanese Diplomatic Service.
- PO, D. LON, DR. : Karen leader ; worked for reconciliation with Burmese.
- PO, SAN C., DR. : M.D. ; Karen leader ; ed. America and England ; knighted ; instrumental in reconciliation with Burmese ; died 1946.
- SAN WE (THAKIN) : formerly Private Secretary to Thakin Mya ; now member of the House of Deputies.
- SAW, U : b. 1900 ; lower-grade pleader ; Member, Legislative Council and House of Representatives ; leader of Myo-chit Party ; went to Japan, 1935 ; jailed for sedition, 1938 ; Minister for Forests and Agriculture, 1939 ; Prime Minister, 1940 ; refused to sign Aung San-Attlee Agreement, 1947 ; convicted of instigating assassination of Aung San and other leaders, 1947 ; executed in 1948.
- SET, DR. : b. 1880 ; joined Accounts Department ; Commissioner, Rangoon Municipal Corporation, 1930-39 ; Vice-Chancellor, University of Rangoon, 1932-38 and 1940-42 ; member of Independence Preparatory Committee ; Privy Councillor and later Minister for Finance during Japanese régime ; now a Director of the Union Bank of Burma.
- SHIDAYI : Lt.-General ; succeeded Tanaka as Chief of Staff during Japanese retreat.
- SO, THAKIN : Formerly employee of Burma Oil Co. ; communist ; interned, 1940 ; organized guerrillas against Japanese, 1942 ;

joined A.F.P.F.L., 1944; broke off from A.F.P.F.L., and organized Red Flag Communist Guerillas, 1946; still in rebellion.

SUZUKI: Japanese doctor in Rangoon, the main link with the Japanese.

TAKARNO: Japanese Adviser to Burmese Government.

TAKASHITA: Major in Japanese Army.

TANAKA: Lt.-General; Chief of Staff during Japanese occupation.

THAN TUN: b. 1915; school teacher; communist; organized resistance against Japan; Executive for Agriculture, 1942; General Secretary of A.F.P.F.L., 1944; broke off from A.F.P.F.L., 1947; led the White Communist insurrection, 1948; now in armed rebellion.

THEIN MAUNG: Barrister; ed. Burma and England; Advocate-General, 1938; Member of Independence Preparatory Committee; Minister for Justice, 1943; Chief Justice of the Union of Burma since 1952.

THEIN PE (TET-PONGYI): Journalist and author; communist leader (Constitutional); representative in India of Resistance Movement, 1942-45; author of *What Happened in Burma, Tet-pongyi*, etc.

TIN, THAKIN: b. 1903; lawyer; Executive Member of Do Bama Party; President, All Burma Peasants Association, 1941; officer in Burma Independence Army under Japanese; Political Secretary; Resistance leader; President, All Burma Peasants and Workers Union, since 1946; Executive Member of Socialist Party and A.F.P.F.L.; Minister for Forests and Agriculture, 1947; Minister for Land Nationalisation, 1952.

Tojo: Japanese Premier.

TUN AUNG, U: Member of Legislative Council and House of Representatives; Minister for Justice and later for Co-operation under Japanese; now practising law.

TUN OKE (THAKIN): b. 1906; ed. Rangoon and Colombo; joined Do Bama Party; seceded with Thakin Ba Sein, 1939; escaped to Japan, 1940; Chief Administrator during Japanese invasion, 1942; Executive for Forests, 1942-43; Minister for National Planning under British Government, 1946; now in opposition.

WANG: General in Chinese Army.

YAN NAING: Student leader; Colonel in the Burma Defence Army; son-in-law of Dr. Ba Maw.

# INDEX

Burmans usually have two names, but some have only one. Ordinarily there is a distinctive prefix: *Maung* (brother), *Ko* (elder brother), *U* (Uncle), or some term indicating military or civil status, *e.g.* *bo*, *thakin*. Here they are entered in alphabetical order under the first or only name, and the prefix, which varies with circumstances, is disregarded, except where there is only one name.

- Adipati, xxv, 66, 68, 73, 78, 81-85, 87-89, 91, 97, 104, 106-108, 110-112, 119-123, 125. *See also* Ba Maw
- Advisory Council (Japanese), 95
- A.F.P.F.L. (Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League), 125, 126-130
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